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# APPLIED NONSENSE

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CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND PROBLEM SOLVING THROUGH “PLAY” AND  
USE OF HUMOR IN THE CLASSROOM: AN INNOVATIVE TEACHING  
PHILOSOPHY

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A Study of Creativity in the English Classroom  
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#### Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

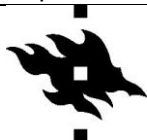
In this research paper, I discuss a philosophy of teaching I refer to as “Applied Nonsense.” I highlight that this teaching philosophy is of great significance in the field of education and that is it one influential way to prepare modern students with the creativity and creative problem solving skills needed for an evolving world which holds many pressing and critical global challenges. Furthermore, I highlight the benefits it likely has for the student learning process. I developed Applied Nonsense (AN) teaching philosophy because I needed a way to better define my own teaching style as an educator. I needed a way to describe my method of interaction, engaging, and influencing students. As well, my ideas about effective pedagogy through the implementation of AN are backed by an endless amount of research in the fields of education and psychology. With my research, I give this teaching style an appropriate name, and I help define what I believe encompasses this teaching technique. Additionally, I have given some examples of how the teaching technique can be used to better teach English as a Second Language (ESL).

Through a two part survey process, I collected data from both students and teachers on their thoughts and feelings about AN theory techniques used in the classroom environment. I aimed to find whether or not the average person is open to the style of AN teaching methods and whether they feel that AN is helpful to their learning process. Furthermore, my aim was to share my ideas with fellow educators and those unfamiliar with the teaching techniques to encourage them to implement this teaching technique as part of their teacher tool kit. In my opinion, AN is a teaching technique that is implemented by some of the most skillful, knowledgeable, and effective professionals in the field of education and my research finding greatly suggest that most teachers and students agree that AN is an effective aid for the teaching-studying-learning process.

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## Foreword

I would like to thank all of the people involved in helping me make this project a reality. Firstly, I would like to thank my parents and all of the amazing teachers throughout my childhood, like Ms. Heiden, who helped introduce me to Applied Nonsense teaching techniques, and who fostered my creativity and a love for humor and learning. I would like to thank my childhood inspiration, Jim Henson, for helping to make my childhood magical and weird, and for first introducing me to AN at the tender age of 4. A big thank you to my childhood friends, namely Alli Williams Spencer with whom I went on many adventures and for whom I credit the best parts of my early childhood, and other high school and University friends, namely a group of witty, clever, talented guy friends including Ian Brennan co-creator-writer of *Glee*, for developing my love for humor, raising the humor bar high, for all the endless laughter and inspiration. You have all helped to mold me into the person and teacher I am today. From University of Helsinki, I would like to thank my English academic advisor and mentor Elizabeth Peterson for her understanding, patience, time, encouragement, support, guidance, ideas, and advice throughout my thesis writing process; thank you Liz for supporting my thesis topic change for one that suited my personal educational goals and for your ideas and help in developing AN theory for the English department requirements. Additionally, a very big thanks to my Education academic advisor and mentor Matti Meri who is an AN teacher/kindred spirit. I can't thank you enough for your understanding, embrace, encouragement, and shared enthusiasm for this teaching method. Your time, guidance, and helpful/thoughtful ideas for the organization and execution of my thoughts was very instrumental for this thesis topic to take form; thank you for pulling those missing puzzle pieces out of your magical teacher pockets. I would also like to thank my 2017/2018 STEP student colleagues for their willingness to partake in my Applied Nonsense survey process as well as for their support in our "Teacher as a Researcher" seminar class. And a further thank you to my mentor James McWhirr at Matlilidens Gymnasium for allowing me to lecture and administer the AN surveys to his IB

students, and for his helpful and constructive teaching advice. Moreover, I send a big thank you to those students at Matliden for partaking in my thesis survey process. I would like to send out a further thank you to my teacher friends and colleagues in both the United States and Finland for volunteering to partake in my survey. Also, huge thanks to Sir Ken Robinson for his inspirational book “Out of our Minds” and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi for his many thoughts and research on Flow theory, whose works were both research goldmines; they really helped me stay focused and driven during my research to complete this thesis project. A heartfelt thank you to my husband, Antti, and my son, Aki, and my family and friends for supporting me and helping me find the inspiration and time away from real life to make this project a reality. And lastly but not least, to all my former students for helping me learn what it means to be a good teacher and allowing me the privilege to guide you in your formative years, for all the inspiration and unforgettable moments and lessons learnt. So much thanks.



# 1. Introduction: My Personal Theory about School Education

During my research for this thesis project, I stumbled upon a story told by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi who humorously opens his “Flow and Education” article suggesting everyone simply call him “Mike” and not bother much attempting to pronounce his complicated surname (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.129) In the story, he offers that his last name sounds like *CHICK-sent-mee-hi*, and he then segues effortlessly into an explanation of the etymology for his surname, which apparently leads back to a remote village in Transylvania. In an interesting twist of fate, he tells of a story where his cousin sent him a photograph of an old wooden school sign located in this remote Transylvanian town which reads (when translated into English), “the roots of knowledge are bitter but its fruits are sweet” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.129). From the words of Csikszentmihalyi regarding this statement on the sign,

“That really struck me . . . because for over 30 years I have been trying to demonstrate the opposite: namely, that the roots of knowledge do not necessarily have to be bitter. . . I knew that somehow the acquisition, [sic] of knowledge can be a tremendously exciting and enjoyable process. The reason that we carve those words on schools is that schools themselves make knowledge bitter, not because knowledge itself is such.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.129)

Csikszentmihalyi’s words hung solid in my mind like the image of that wooden sign as did the incredible irony of his ancestral roots with that of the sign that states a sentiment so opposite his personal life’s ambition. All too often, we hear personal stories from far too many people in our lives about why they are so happy to be done with school, or similarly that they didn’t learn anything useful in school; information went in and then went right back out, nothing was retained. School was a waste of their time. And exceptionally boring, except for maybe one teacher, or one class, or one subject they found most stimulating or easy. So many Westernized schools have traditionally been driven by teacher centered lectures, meant to cram facts, names and dates, encyclopedia-worthy information into young minds in the hopes that students temporarily hang onto these facts to pass high stakes standardized tests meant to validate the effectiveness of

the educators and the institutions they work within. And more often than not, this forced information never gets stored within the long term memory of those students who are the unfortunate victims of this broken system of knowledge transfer.

In the age of the internet, where anyone can look up any inquiry about anything and we can have these useful facts at the click of a computer button, it is no surprise that the emphasis on learning has notably and understandably taken a big shift in the last 30 years. Thankfully the focus on teacher-centered lecturing is being phased out and is frowned upon in modern teaching. Modern ideas about education are recognizing that cramming kids full of information is not the best way to prepare them for the real world. (Robinson, 2011). Today's world requires more than ever that instead of maintaining factual bits of knowledge, students know where to find these facts, know what to do with them, know how to sort out useful, reliable information, know how to identify facts from fictions, and know how to implement or use these facts to make a change or difference in the world (De Bono, 1992; Robinson, 2011). Teaching children to think and teaching them what to do with the information they seek has become a globally recognized and needed skill to impart on students with the hope that they are able to solve the real world problems facing humanity in the very near future (De Bono, 1992; Robinson, 2011).

In order to produce a society of people with the capacity and ability for creative, innovative, ground breaking problem solving skills, we need to ignite a lifelong love and desire for learning (OECD, 2000; Robinson, 2011). How do we make students hold onto their love of learning and what can we do as educators to make sure that we prepare them for real life?

One thing that is very clear and widely discussed in the field of education is the incredible, insatiable curiosity and inquisitive nature that is innate to young children (Robinson, 2011). Humans are born with a desire for knowledge and for understanding or making sense of the world around them. They do this learning about life through experimentation that they call *play* (Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, 2016). *Play* has often been referred to lovingly as a child's profession. Seek out any typical child, and you will find that they can't get enough of

*play*. This is so widely understood that it has become the basis of early childhood education, and in countries like Finland, children spend from birth until age seven solely learning through the element of *play* and social interaction.

Even throughout primary school, this element of *play* is revisited often, and maintains a good part of a student's learning process, both in school and out of school. Enjoyment and fun is still a fundamental element of learning at this stage of education.

However, for some reason, as students age into teenage-hood and young adulthood, and enter secondary school or high school, the emphasis on enjoyment, play or any element of fun is oftentimes lost. Perhaps some element of fun and playfulness is then revisited once students embark upon university learning, but not always. The balance of providing enjoyment with the onslaught and influx of necessary information is not always thoughtfully met by educators. Oftentimes, education is overwhelmed by this moto of "so much to do, so little time." It is nonetheless alarming that this pivotal stage between primary school and university life often leaves far too many students feeling less than enthused about their learning environment or what they've gained during their years of schooling. This is arguably the pivotal moment at which many students lose that lust for learning. And often times, if their love for learning has not been squandered away during high school and they decide to continue their education, a great number of university students, especially in the United States, enter university life unprepared for the academic demands and real world career challenges awaiting them because the opportunities for learning to think and problem solve have not been given.

With the early educational practices of students in mind, I ask why it is that so many high school teachers stop approaching lessons and topics from an element of *play* once secondary schooling begins? There is no doubt that the structure of education has been focused on producing high results in standardized testing. One of the major challenges in education is striking a balance between teaching what needs to be taught for students to progress within the framework of the existing educational systems, and also preparing students with the knowledge, and problem solving skills they will need in the real world (Robinson, 2011). Moreover, the biggest hurdle for many educators, school systems, and policy makers is to help enforce and bring about the changes within the educational

systems that are holding many students back and causing them to lose that lust for learning and education that is ever present in early childhood (Robinson, 2011). As Csikszentmihalyi (1982) wisely stated, “Higher education succeeds or fails in terms of motivation, not cognitive transformation of information. It succeeds if it instills in students a willingness to pursue knowledge for its own sake; it fails if students learn simply in order to get a degree” (p.15).

Thankfully, modern teachers are recognizing that students should be the center of their own learning, where they are able to have an influence in their own learning, more hands on, creating things, developing things, having discussion and actively thinking about things, and learning to problem solve. The teacher is more of a “guide on the side” and a “bank of knowledge or support.” Modern students are being presented with situations in which they have more ability to explore how they learn best, and therefore tailor their learning and make it individual to their learning needs. As well, educators are encouraging and teaching their students self-reflection and peer-reflection skills to help own their own learning process.

## **1.1 My Experiences with Learning and Teaching**

I often wonder which came first, is my insatiable appetite for learning something that is a natural part of who I am, or was the seed of curiosity planted by those early caregivers and information givers in my life? I was fortunate to have been thrown into a world of supportive parents and educators. As a result, it was easy and effortless for me to learn to love learning.

Despite all of this inspiration and my early love for learning, I will not to say that I found learning easy. Learning was not something that came easily to me, in fact quite the contrary. I found learning to be difficult, and as a result I worked very hard in school to keep up with my peers. I found that when presented with subjects I found challenging, the teacher’s personality, skills, and creative approaches to teaching and assessment are what made learning possible for me. If I was enjoying myself and the information was presented in an interesting, intriguing, or fun manner, learning anything seemed possible. I was able to step-up to the challenges of learning because these skillful teachers captured my interest and motivation in a given subject. In turn, these

teachers helped to raise my self-esteem by providing projects and opportunities which I found interesting and easier to succeed with, rather than more traditional methods, like the memorization of facts, or test results that were based on the memorization of these facts. These facts were in turn expected to be internalized into memory from very unstimulating standard teacher-centered lecture format which I found challenging.

This is not to suggest that all my teachers were inspiring or lived up to this standard. I encountered these more traditional less-inspiring teacher types as well throughout the years. It wasn't until much later on in my education that I really understood or made the connection that any subject could be interesting to me or "easy" to learn if the teacher presented the information in a way that inspired and motivated my interests.

## **1.2 Developing AN Theory**

When thinking about the education of young children, it is up to the teacher to motivate, captivate, maintain, and inspire their students. And sadly, even with all the research and interest in educational improvement over the last 40 years, I have encountered far too many teachers and school systems clinging to old fashioned pedagogy ideas. A stubborn resistance to change and a belief system that "what worked in the past will continue to work in the future," along with a general laziness on the part of the teacher to learn new methods and develop new curriculum are too likely reasons for the lack of evolution in pedagogy. Other possible reasons are a lack of understanding how to implement new pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning for those teachers who have been teaching for many decades. As well, the educational systems as a whole being overwhelmed by the massive need for restructuring, maintenance, training, and enforcing such big pedagogical changes are likely at fault, or then likely some combination of all these factors. Nevertheless, the lack of pedagogical evolution has been a problem that I have encountered during my teacher training and with some of my teacher colleagues and schools throughout recent years, even within Finland.

After working for more than a decade with young children, I had a moment of self-reflection about my own teaching. Who am I as a teacher? How do I develop rapport with my students? What sort of methods do I have in my toolbox to pull out and use when applicable?

I recognized great importance in the role of playful learning through my work with young children. All of the fundamental building blocks and skills needed for school preparation are done during these formative years, and always through some element of *play*. And I intrinsically realized that most of the meaningful learning I have personally done throughout my entire education has happened through some element of *play*, even in higher education, whether it be writing a story, inventing or creating something for a project in school, experimentation in some science course, or learning to cooperate and work with others on collaborative projects. As adults, we can effortlessly and instinctively trade-in playing with physical toys, puzzles, and games for playing with ideas, big concepts, solving problems, or perhaps engaging in thoughtful discussion. As adults our ability for play is arguably endless, however commonly adults suggest they have forgotten how to play.

The times in my own education that lacked some element of *play*, humor, or fun seem lost in the sea of my memories. In fact I don't recall learning anything without some combination of these three ingredients. If a long lecture or discussion was not broken-up with some hands-on group work or project, or something entertaining or fun, like a funny antidote, comical quote or visual, it was lost and forgotten. And so, in order to explain my thoughts about effective playful teaching the term "Applied Nonsense" came about.

## 2. Targets of the Research

This brings me to heart of my research project. As an educator I am interested in how to best provide my students with an environment which is stimulating and invites learning and a love for learning. As I suggested, through my own educational experiences as a young student as well as my experiences with young students as an educator for many years, I have adopted and tried to further develop a philosophy of teaching that I know to be effective for my own learning abilities. As well, I have seen evidence in my classrooms that it is an effective method for helping students learn, and it helps to keep their enthusiasm and love for learning present. I have given the name “Applied Nonsense” (AN) to a style of teaching that I suggest has been in use as a method for learning since likely the early concepts of education were founded.

In short, AN is the use of humor and playfulness in the classroom. Through my research, I suggest that approaching subjects from an angle of play, adding fun and humor to lessons when and where applicable, will overall improve the learning climate in a classroom on multitude of levels. By implementing Applied Nonsense techniques, a teacher can help to build rapport with students, and make them feel welcome and at ease in the classroom. Humor lightens the mood and atmosphere of the learning environment which might otherwise be intimidating for some students who might struggle with or lack confidence in a given subject or topic.

Furthermore, by presenting some material that is either visual or auditory or some combination of both, the teacher is able to grab the attention of the students and hopefully maintain their attention. It is also a way to further link ideas, concepts, and topics to the real world, or to perhaps make complex ideas more tangible. Adding something light hearted or fun in the middle of some task or lecture that requires deep thought or concentration is a way to break-up the difficult task and refresh students who are not able to concentrate for such long periods of time. Or then additionally, it is helpful for those individuals that have difficulty concentrating because they find the topic or subject otherwise uninteresting or difficult; if these uninteresting topics can be linked to something meaningful for these students, we have a better chance of engaging them and helping them process and learn the content being presented.

Moreover, by adding these elements of interest via Applied Nonsense techniques, I argue that for many students the nonsense material helps them retain and learn the information being presented. By presenting students with something visual, tangible, and/or auditory, that is meaningful and related to the topic, the teacher is providing an opportunity for the students to link the information with something memorable, with the hopes that they will be able to retain the information in long term memory.

In my research for this paper, I will explore the concepts of play, creativity, imagination, humor, learning, and memory, to better understand how all of these ideas come together in the field of research surrounding education and pedagogy. In my opinion, it is imperative for educators to help motivate and activate a lifelong love for learning in their students, and that one of the key ingredients in kindling this flame is to use this method of teaching I refer to as Applied Nonsense. AN is a teaching technique that I feel is very useful for helping foster student creativity as well as build their creative problem solving skills to help prepare them for solving the complex global changes and issues we will face in the near future.

In my opinion, fostering student creativity is essential, as creativity is perhaps one of the most useful and needed skills in life, aside from attributes like kindness, empathy, and wisdom. All avenues and skills in life require some element of creativity for success: artists, musicians, scientists, writers, poets, architects, inventors, entrepreneurs, directors, comedians, actors etc. These are the people who make pivotal and meaningful contributions to society.

Moreover, I feel strongly that fostering student creativity and creative problem solving skills increases happiness and quality of life by adding more layers of appreciation in one's life as well as self-satisfaction and self-gratification, which in turn increases an individual's self-esteem.

Perhaps my scope and hopes are a bit utopian, but for me the process of successful and meaningful education is as clear as providing a plant with the sunshine, water, soil, temperature and nutrients needed to promote growth and beauty. If those elements are available, you have a happy, healthy, thriving plant. So too would you have the same in students if only they are given a similar formula for success, love, and zest for learning



and life in their education. Of course, it is a bit more complicated with humans than plants, as the variables for developing success and happiness are far more complex, but we have to start somewhere, and exhibit some control over the variables we can control as educators.

In order to have some idea whether my ideas surrounding the effectiveness of AN teaching philosophy is widely accepted as one that is helpful for aiding student learning and whether or not it is a method of teaching that is used widely by modern teachers, I developed a two part survey process to explore the attitudes and feelings of both teachers and students surrounding AN teaching theories. The findings from my survey highly suggest that AN teaching philosophies are widely accepted by most students and teachers as both a positive and effective method for the teaching-studying-learning process for the average person.

### **3. Theoretical Background: Important Concepts and Issues of the Teaching-Studying-Learning Process**

In this section I will discuss the current and leading philosophies from the literature and research surrounding several topics which I feel are fundamental to understanding how we can help motivate modern children and young adults to learn and to learn to love learning. The theory from this section highlights my ideas about what makes for effective, useful teaching and learning, and so supports my feelings that AN is an effective method of teaching which can help prepare students with the skills they will need for success in the modern working world as well as help students develop a sense of self-fulfilment in life.

#### **3.1 What Makes for Good Teaching and Learning?**

In some ways, we can think of a good teacher as we would a good book, or an excellently written, casted, and performed theatre production or TV series. Although people have their differing general interests and not all books, plays, or series appeal to everyone, there are aspects to some of these pieces in mind that most people would agree are what make them special, endearing, and likeable. There are some books that become a part of an international literary canon for a reason, or some plays like Shakespeare's that last the test of time. A good book should have an intriguing title, start off strong to grab the reader's attention, and have an interesting story to tell. It should move the reader in some significant way, perhaps give the reader something to learn. It should continue to have at least curious moments that keep the reader engaged and interested so that they want to finish the novel. If the book has done its job, the reader will want to read it all over again, or start a new novel written by the same author. And the author and their skill is what creates the fabric of this book, this story. A skillful author has good comedic timing, control over their craft, is skillful with language and storytelling; too much information can ruin a good story, too little leaves the story feeling incomplete.

These qualities and traits that make-up a good book or an effective author, are in some ways similar to those that make an effective and good teacher; it requires a good balance of knowledge and skill to create a book or then rather to create an effective environment for learning. It isn't possible to please everyone, individuals learn in their own unique ways. However, there are generally likeable and helpful qualities in teachers and in the methods that they apply in the learning environment that appeal to almost all students. And overall, these aspects help to create a classroom environment which invites and ignites learning and a love for learning. According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1982), "The best way to get students to believe that it makes sense to pursue knowledge is to believe in it oneself. Thus, an effective professor is one who is intrinsically motivated to learn, because it is he or she who will have the best chance to educate others" (p. 15-16).

### 3.2 What is Modern Play?

Educators the world over are recognizing that one of the most valuable aspects of Finland's early childhood education is the focus on playing. Finland's ECEC suggests that children play for the sake of playing and that *play* can give them a deep sense of satisfaction. And the absolute brilliance of *play* is that although kids don't play in order to learn, they end up learning through *play*. (Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, 2016 p.45) This is because *play* creates an opportunity for children to feel joyful and happy, as well it is the way children essentially think, act, learn, and process what they see, hear, and experience; it is how they learn about the world around them. (Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, 2016 p.47) Early childhood educators are there as active participants in facilitating *play* by dropping in ideas and providing tools and materials for young students.

The ECEC's ideas and research about effective learning in early childhood support my ideas about student learning throughout their entire academic career. With all of the evidence and support for playful learning in early childhood education it is easy to intuitively suggest that *play* in some form, can be used and implemented as successfully in higher education with similar effects on older students. After all, "adulthood" is but a definition given to a certain passing of time in one's life, rather than a reflection of how an individual feels inside about their life. With this in mind, just because we age out of a

time in life we refer to as “childhood” doesn’t mean we stop needing to enjoy ourselves or *play*. Rather, our *play* becomes more complex and multi-leveled like the experiences and knowledge we encounter through the passage of time into the phase of life we call “adulthood.” As Jan Kociumbas (1997) points out in her book *Australian Childhood: A History* “Childhood is an adult creation.” They are but young adults whose behavior is as she suggests, “fundamental human behavior, not yet obscured by a veneer of civilization” (p.xii).

Therefore *Play* then in some form that is appropriate to student age, as thoughtful discussion or group projects, is just as meaningful and necessary for learning in older students. Lessons can be approached from a playful aspect to engage older students and the use of AN techniques in the classroom is one diverse way to help students of all ages engage in *play*; it is an easy way to bring a playful element to foster motivation and a love for learning in young children as well as young adults. And it seems blatantly obvious to me that the socially interactive aspect of play and engaging with others is the most realistic means of learning because it involves hands-on experience and problem solving, and bridges skills needed for school to those most in demand for real life working situations. Craft, Jeffery, and Liebling (2001) highlight and support my ideas that playing with ideas, material and information are a central focus for creative practices for students of all ages and that *play* is a highly valued strategy used in organizations to encourage both social cohesion and creative ideas (p. 9). Moreover, a great many researchers recognize that early opportunities for *play* are essential for developing creative adults (Craft, Jeffery, & Liebling, 2001, p. 9).

### **3.3 Contents of Good and Effective Thinking**

There is this interesting grey area between the terms “to teach” and “to learn”, it is hard to separate the two processes. A lot of the individual learning process requires one to teach oneself how to learn, or rather to learn how to learn. As interestingly pointed out by one of my professors, Matti Meri, there is a word in the Finnish language “opetella” that doesn’t exist in the English language, as far as I am aware. Perhaps the origins of the word “opetella” is due to the general understanding and cultural philosophy in Finland surrounding the practice of teaching and learning. In Finnish, the term

“opetella” refers to the process of learning how to learn. Learning how to learn is a fundamental process in the ability for individuals to learn information that doesn’t effortlessly and easily become part of their working knowledge. Learning a subject or bit of information that is not interesting or that is difficult for individuals to understand requires that people find strategies and ways to help them retain the information or understand challenging concepts. Without understanding and developing strategies for learning and organizing ideas, it is arguably not possible for individuals to learn more complex ideas or store new and challenging information. Learning to learn is fundamental for the process of learning, so it is really interesting that there is no one term to describe this in the English language; and perhaps it is telling about the fundamental flaws in traditional approaches to education the world over.

Moreover, an educator is not able to teach well if they don’t understand how their students learn on an individual level, so again at the heart of effective teaching is the connection between the two terms; arguably, they either coexist or they don’t truly exist at all.

### 3.3.1 Thinking Fast and Slow

In his book “Thinking, Fast and Slow” Nobel Prize winning psychologist and behavioral economist Daniel Kahneman (2011) discusses a system for understanding the way we think and process information. He suggests that the mind can be thought to operate in two systems, which he refers to as System 1 and System 2. (Kahneman, 2011, p.20). System 1 or “thinking fast” refers to thoughts that are intuitive or that come automatically (Kahneman, 2011, p.20). These thoughts operate in an effortless system. System 2 or “thinking slowly” refers to thoughts that require complex thought (Kahneman, 2011, p.20). These thoughts are deliberately effortful, and controlling them operates a system of strain. They require skills and problem solving, and engaging in them means that one cannot do them while “making a left turn into traffic” as Kahneman suggests (Kahneman, 2011, p.20).

Kahneman’s ideas about the way human’s process information and think is important for my research because his ideas support my own about the way humans learn best. He discusses how the mind is terrible at remembering lists (Kahneman, 2011) or therefore memorizing information for the sake of memorizing something for an exam, for

example. Through his research Kahneman subjects students to a series of situations which test their memory skills along with their automatic responses to situations and stimulus and he shows that there are strong physical reactions to words that affect their ability to process information (Kahneman, 2011, p. 378- 81). Furthermore, he discusses the distinction between two selves, the experiencing self and the remembering self (Kahneman, 2011, p.14) with regard to individuals experiencing a sense of well-being and happiness. He goes on to suggest that our memories of a situation are what we hang onto, and become a part of our memory and therefore what we learn and take in from a situation (Kahneman, 2011, p.14). What's interesting to me about Kahneman's research and ideas is that they can undoubtedly be applied to this teaching and learning process. His research supports my ideas that providing students with an environment that promotes learning by intentionally adding humorous or fun stimulus along with factual bits of information provides students with a great likelihood that the information sinks-in and moves students' emotionally in some positive way that they then remember the experience, and therefore learn.

### **3.4 The Process of Teaching-Studying-Learning**

As mentioned in the previous section, teaching and learning are not simply terms that exist in stationary isolation, but rather they are continual evolving processes that coexist together. In order for an individual to learn new information or concepts, they must be able to teach themselves to learn, and this is done through a process of studying information as well as studying or understanding how it is that they can make sense of this new information with their current existing knowledge about the world. As well, it requires they understand or find methods how they can best remember and store this new information in long term memory.

#### **3.4.1 Concept of Learning**

The concept of learning is as Merriam and Caffarella point out "central to human behavior yet so elusive to understanding" (248), and it has been a topic that has fascinated great philosophers as far back in time as Plato and Aristotle (248).

Until the 1950's the leading theory in learning is that it was seen as a change in behavior (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 249). Merriam & Cafferella (1999) point out however

that this definition fails to capture the complexities involved in the process (p. 249).

They propose a better definition of learning would be one stated by Maples and Webster in 1980, which is “Learning can be thought of as a process by which behavior changes as a result of experiences.” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 250)

Learning as a ‘process’ is at the heart of learning, it is not an end product, in theory it doesn’t have an end. Learning focuses on what happens when the learning takes place, these processes manifest themselves in the numerous learning theories that have been developed (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 250). Merriam and Cafferella (1999) point out that there is little consensus on how many learning theories exist or for that matter how they should be divided for discussion, but in their book they discuss five leading theories: behaviorist, cognitivist, humanist, social learning, and constructivist. The two major functions that all of these leading theories on learning provide are helping us understand the many examples of learning that can be observed (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.250).

Of particular interest to me and my research are the effects these different theories have had on shaping the educational system and the teacher’s role in the learning process. Each of these learning theories have had some meaningful contribution to one another, either in pursuit of better explaining and understanding the complexity of the learning process. They approach the idea of learning from different angles, which will hopefully help us take better control of the learning process, both as learners and teachers.

However, whether learning takes place depends a great deal on the learner. “Learning is the attainment of knowledge, a skill, or information, either by yourself, through study and experience, or through a teacher” (Safran, 2001, p. 81). Safran points out that in order for a learner to be open to new information he or she must be mindful that the new information is one perspective of among many and that there is a need to reflect on the subject matter, looking at it from many angles, all the while processing the new information (2001, p. 81). In short, the learning process is extremely complex especially when you think of the need for the learner to then use this new influx of information in a new context or then to be able to manipulate it mentally to fit an existing understanding of a given topic or concept (Safran. 2001, p.81).

### 3.4.2 Memory and Learning

It is not possible to think about the concept of learning without also thinking about one's ability to retain new information and to be able to call upon the information throughout one's lifetime via his or her memory. The ability to memorize bits of information is an intriguing topic because often times it alludes us why certain things stick with us and other bits of information fade. Researchers have found that "memory is affected by our ability to relate new information to previous experience and knowledge." (Bransford and Stein, 1993, p.146). This process is known as elaboration. There is also a memorization strategy known as elaboration strategy which uses this idea of linking relatable information to new information. One example of using elaboration strategy for memorization is when someone born on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of a month might remember the number 17 in a lock combination by making a mental note that the number in the combination relates to their birthday (Bransford and Stein, 146).

Certainly our individual interest in a given topic, or emotional reaction to the bit of information, or personal connection to the information, or our exposure and repetition of the information all play a big part in our ability to remember a given piece of information. As an educator, it is important to think about ways that we can try to make information or topics bridge these personal connections to information for our students and to help them think about and develop their own ability and strategies to memorize information. Using AN techniques is one such way that teachers can help students feel a connection to topics. One memory technique used in AN is known to researchers as "interactive imagery" where linking information to something visual is known to be effective as a method for helping individuals enhance and improve their memory skills (Bransford and Stein, 1993, p. 146). A number of researchers have found that interactive imagery strategies have been found to work extremely well for most people (Bransford and Stein, 1993, p.146). This supports my idea that AN is a useful and helpful method of teaching and learning for most individuals.

### 3.4.3 Intelligence and Learning

It is difficult to discuss the topic of learning and one's ability to memorize new information without thinking also about intelligence. But what exactly is intelligence, or rather what makes someone intelligent? "Intelligence is one of those qualities that we



think we can recognize in people but when we try to define it, it slips from our grasp” (Robinson, 2011, p.82). Sir Ken Robinson (2011) points out that there is no one agreed upon definition of intelligence among the many specialists in the fields of education, psychology, or neurology (p.82)

According to Robinson (2011), there are 2 dominant popular conceptions of intelligence that are embedded in the idea of academic ability. The first is known as “intelligence quotient” or rather one’s IQ. The second is one’s ability for the memory of factual information (p.84).

Thinking ‘logically’ is an important part of the popular view of intelligence. The second is having a vast ability to memorize information (Robinson, 2011, p.84). The latter has had a profound influence on the way the educational systems have focused lessons and learning on the memorization of facts.

Robinson (2011) suggests that our academic IQ is generally thought of in four parts. The most remarkable idea he points out is that there is a common belief that persons are born with a fixed intellectual capacity (p.84). Secondly, he points out that this intelligence is believed to be calculable via tests, which can give a numerical representation of a person’s IQ (Robinson, 2011, p.84). Thirdly he notes that this numerical IQ can then be used to predict ones performance in school and life which is why IQ/standardized tests are so widely used for school selection processes and measuring intelligence (Robinson, 2011, p.84). And most unfortunately, a person’s numerical IQ is then taken as the index of their general intelligence, disregarding any other skills or intelligences a person may possess ((Robinson, 2011, p.84)). Robinson (2011) points out, “IQ is one of the most compelling inventions of the modern world” (p. 84). I agree with Robinson that cultural ideas about intelligence have become “dangerously narrow” while other valuable and needed intellectual abilities are either “ignored or underestimated” (p.84) as he suggests. Among these valuable skills that are highly overlooked is creativity. Creativity is often disassociated with intelligence and this is likely one of the main reasons that it is not a central focus in the formal educational systems the world over. Robinson’s (2011) thoughts reflect a similar sentiment.

### **3.5 Intelligence and Thinking in Formal Education**

The role of IQ and thoughts about intelligence are of great importance to me as a teacher because as De Bono (1992) also points out, “Intelligence is a potential. Thinking is the skill with which we use that potential.” (p.5). Far too many educators often think of highly intelligent people as being automatically productive or “good” thinkers (De Bono, 1992, p.6). De Bono’s idea is that intelligence and thinking are not one in the same and that one of the main problems in education is the lack of understanding their separation (1992, p.6). He points out that educators assume that intelligent students are automatically good thinkers, which he points out is not always true (De Bono, 1992, p.6). Moreover, he suggests that educators often overlook student potential, as oftentimes they assume those students they identify as less intelligent will never be good thinkers; they classify them as a hopeless case (De Bono, 1992, p.6).

He talks about reactive vs. proactive thinking in his research. He points out that the popular mode of reactive information transfer, that is giving students identified problems with all of the answers, fits within the existing framework of traditional education systems and that this is problematic because it doesn’t prepare students for the challenges of solving real life problems (De Bono, 1992, p.10). He emphasizes the need for educational systems to switch to a more “pro-active” approach to teaching, that is, giving students opportunities to think by not providing them with all the information needed to solve problems (De Bono, 1992, p.10).

Like many other researchers, De Bono (1992) suggests that our current world is less in need of critical thinkers and more in need of creative innovative thinkers (p. 11). His thoughts reflect my own feelings as an educator and support my ideas that using teaching techniques such as AN are of great importance to help develop students’ creative thinking and problem solving skills.

### **3.6 Creativity in the Classroom**

In her article about creativity, Ritva Nyfors (2003) from the Department of Education at University of Helsinki explores the concept of creativity. She is interested in the different approaches to it, the personal properties possessed by creative persons, the

creative process of problem solving, and how creativity is being encouraged in pedagogy and teaching. Her article is of particular interest to me because to better argue that creativity is something that can be fostered in young minds and learnt through teaching students in a creative fashion with the aid of Applied Nonsense, it is important to know all that there is to be known about the complex concept of creativity. Nyfors' article (2003) does a good job summarizing this broadly scoping, elusive, complex phenomenon in the context of its importance and significance in educational settings (Nyfors, 2003, p.23).

Creativity is a broad term used to explain the many kinds of individual and communal functions that have been brought about by different individuals' abilities, skills, emotions, reasoning, will, and intuition (Nyfors, 2003, p. 23).

There have been many studies set out to better understand, measure, and test for creativity in individuals, as well as to better clarify what exactly creativity means. There has been a considerable amount of discussion about the connection between creativity and intelligence, as well as the personality traits usually associated with creative persons (Nyfors, 2003, p. 23).

Moreover, Robinson (2011) sets out to answer three questions that are of relevance to my research which are: Why is it essential to promote creativity? What happens when we grow up to make us feel like we're not creative? Can creativity be developed and had by everyone, and if so, how? Robinson (2011) further suggests with his research that our modern complex world requires the need for more creative persons to meet these modern challenges (p.1). His ideas reflect my sentiments that our educational system needs to be rethought and restructured so that it as he suggests, "flourish(es) the creativity in everyone" (Robinson, 2011, p.1). He furthermore points out that many companies reflect that they have trouble finding employees who are flexible, creative, quickly adaptable persons able to communicate and work in teams further suggesting a serious need for a change in the academic pursuits of education (Robinson, 2011, p.2).

Additionally, Anna Craft (2001) has done extensive research on individuals who identify as creative persons through her study on "Little c Creativity" (LLC). Her research is of notable interest to me because her creative respondents all seemed to

identify with a sense of childlike playfulness and attitude to life, as this supports my idea that approaching subjects from an angle of play is something that helps students develop their creativity as well as foster it (Craft 2001).

Craft furthermore highlights the importance of play in her studies on LCC, “being open to playing with ideas and new possibilities/combinations, is logically necessary to LCC” (59) or rather creativity. In essence, she suggests that toying around with ideas and concepts opens new ideas and concepts.

Craft’s work is furthermore of interest to me because she also highlights that life in the twenty-first century demands that all people develop creativity as a life skill, and that this is something that needs to be addressed by teachers and education systems (Craft 2001, p.59). She argues that creativity can be fostered and that children need to experience it to understand it, and that the education system must play an important role in developing creative individuals. (Craft 2001, p.59). Her ideas greatly reflect my ideas about the importance of using AN techniques in education.

Similarly, De Bono (1992) suggests that there has not been enough serious attention paid to creative thinking in education (p.16). He argues, “In any self-organizing system there is an absolute mathematical necessity for creativity” (De Bono, 1992, p.16).

According to De Bono, a large part of the problem surrounding the idea of teaching creative thinking is that it has been largely considered to be a “mystical gift that some people have and others do not have.” (De Bono, 1992, p.16). Furthermore, he suggests that creative thinking often gets overlooked in terms of its importance and significance because often these ideas are viewed as crazy ideas, suggesting society “may catch up with some of the crazy ideas later or they may remain crazy forever” (De Bono, 1992, p.16).

### 3.6.1 Learning Creativity: Can Creativity Be Taught?

There has been a considerable amount of debate amongst researchers whether creativity can really be taught. Given the nature of the phenomenon it is difficult to study and research in a scientifically sound manner. At the center of this issue is the ambiguity and disagreement over how to define such a concept as creativity (McCarthy, 1987, p.169).

McCarthy (1987) suggests that one of ways we will begin to understand the nature of teaching creativity is to “pay more attention to the people in the trenches, teachers who must facilitate creative behavior and live with the success or failure of their efforts, invalidated though those may be” (p. 175).

According to Sir Ken Robinson, there are a number of ways to help students become creative individuals (2011, p.4). He notes that although creativity does usually involve playing with ideas in a fun manner it is also about working on ideas and projects in a highly focused manner (Robinson, 2011, p.4)). In this way, Robinson suggests that creativity relies on knowledge, skill, and control (Robinson, 2011, p.4).

Jonathan Rowson (2008) suggests, “. . . perhaps the most important role for an educator is to make students aware of their creative freedom where they are least likely to suspect it. One way of doing this is to try to combat functional fixedness in the classroom” (p.89). He uses a chair as an example, suggesting that one way to perceive the chair is for its intended function, to sit on (Rowson, 2008, p. 90). However, he points out that a chair can also be used for other purposes, like a door prop, a step ladder, a goal post, a fort leg, a shield, as well as a multitude of other purposes (Rowson, 2008, p. 90). He suggests that while students passively know this, it is not necessarily a part of what he calls their “perceptual apparatus” (Rowson, 2008, p. 90). In this case, by reinforcing that there are multiple uses for an object like a chair as in this example, the teacher is reinforcing the importance of seeing things from multiple perspectives, which in turn will help to open students’ perceptual fields in everyday life (Rowson, 2008, p. 90). Helping to open students to these profound moments of connection that can transcend the object or the example can in turn change their perception about the world around them. These moments become mind-opening and bending experiences which in turn foster creativity (Rowson, 2008, p. 90). I am suggesting that AN is one such teaching method that helps to abstractly open functional fixedness in the classroom.

### **3.7 Humor in the Classroom**

Humor in educational settings plays a variety of positive functions within the realm of learning. It goes well beyond the simple task of facilitating laughter (Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Liu, 2011, p.116). The notion that humorous instructional communication

plays a positive role in motivation and learning, is shared amongst researchers (Banas et al. 2011, p. 116). Evidence has been found that humor builds classroom cohesion between students and teachers; in the presence of humor, students' responses toward one another were more positive, bringing a unity to the group. In addition, humor was found to reduce classroom stress, by helping individuals cope with their personal stresses (Banas et al., 2011, p.117). Humorous environments can help to relax students as well as diffuse and control problematic behavior in the classroom (Banas et al. 2011, p. 116). This is something that I have found to be true in my own experiences in teaching. And it is evidence that supports the importance of using humor through AN in the classroom.

In addition, Banas et al. (2011) found through their research that five different studies reported that the use of humor was helpful for teachers to build positive rapport with students, as the student's gave their teachers higher student evaluation scores. Furthermore, nine of the research studies they reviewed suggested that student's feel their teachers are more credible when they are able to use humor wisely in the classroom setting (Banas et al. 2011).

Banas et al. (2011) findings support my ideas that humor, when used appropriately and wisely, helps to make the classroom environment more welcoming and inviting to students, which then enables for a better learning environment. Their findings also support my ideas that using AN in the form of humor can be used as a tool for teachers to build trust and rapport with their students (Banas et al. 2011, p.118). It is a way for teachers to personalize their teaching style if it feels genuine and natural for the teacher to use.

Humor can be used with intention or without, both verbally and nonverbally, but the idea is that it is some form of communication or behavior that elicits a positive response, like laughter and joy (Banas et al. 2011, p. 117). Humorous interactions ideally lead to laughter, but there are many other functions it can serve beyond simple amusement in the classroom (Banas et al. 2011, p. 117).

One theory of humor significant to my research that Banas et al. (2011) discuss is incongruity theory, which is based on the idea that surprise or contradiction are essential ingredients for humor to arise (p.118). The theory has an emphasis on cognition so it is more a theory about how humor is understood rather than how it functions socially and emotionally (Banas et al. 2011, p. 119). People are able to understand humorous communication because they are able to solve or resolve some kind of incongruity within the humorous exchange (Banas et al. 2011, p.118). So it becomes an exchange which requires some quick problem solving to understand and gain amusement from. This is what likely creates the element of interest for those individuals who enjoy humor. In a recent study on instructional humor processing theory (IHPT) that used some ideas from incongruity theory show and explain how teaching through humor can aid student learning because it helps to increase attention through a need to understand and make sense of the humor (Banas et al. 2011, p. 119). This is also perhaps why situations in the classroom involving humor may help students remember information.

Arousal theory is another theory of humor that Banas et al. touch on in their research that I found interesting for understanding why humor is useful for educational purposes. This theory is based around the idea that humor and laughter are a combined pleasurable emotional experience that releases the build-up of tension and stress (Banas et al., 2011, p. 119). The idea that humor can be used as a tool to reduce stress in the classroom is explained by this theory (Banas et al. 2011, p.119). Educational material that is presented in a humorous manner may be learnt and recalled better than the same material presented in a more serious fashion (Banas et al. 2011, p. 119). Their findings directly reflect my ideas about the significance and effectiveness of using AN in the classroom to help the teaching-studying-learning process.

### **3.8 The Importance of Motivation and Self-Esteem in Formal Education**

Two very important goals for every skillful educator are to help motivate students and to help build-up their self-esteem. These two areas of development are highly connected to a student's ability to be creative. This is something that was mentioned by both Jonathan Rowson (2008) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1982, 2014) in their individual

studies and writings about harnessing creativity in individuals. Without proper motivation to reach some end goal or believing one can accomplish a certain goal, the ability to harness one's creativity diminishes. Self-doubt and lack of motivation are distractions which prevent concentration and learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.131). Csikszentmihalyi (1982, 2014) has been very intrigued by this question of motivation and his research on highly creative individuals has focused on trying to understand the nature of how it functions; he tries to understand what makes people highly motivated as well as what makes people want to process information. He points out that one of the biggest challenges for educators is that in theory, they have all the information and tools for providing information to students, but all that information isn't going to make a difference unless the student allows that information to come into their head (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.130). Moreover, this ability to process the information is due to the student's personal motivation to take in the information (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.130).

Csikszentmihalyi studied highly creative persons, such as artists and scientists, as he was fascinated by their drive and ability to work long hours without a break in concentration. He suggested they often enter what he refers to as a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1982) which led him to develop the concept he refers to as "Flow Theory." Csikszentmihalyi (1982) describes "Flow Theory" as a mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. Flow is a concept in human psychology where one is thought to be in "the zone". In essence, it is when one is fully absorbed in what one is doing and so loses sense of time and self and enters a state of mind where one doesn't remember that one exists.

Csikszentmihalyi (1982) suggests that flow is the key to happiness. And it is of interest to me as an educator because the ultimate goal for teachers is to help their students reach this state of flow, or rather to provide them with tasks and learning opportunities they are so interested in performing that they enter a state of flow. I purpose using AN techniques in the classroom can help educators help student potential for flow experiences in school by providing them with playful, fun, and humorous material and experiences that stimulate their imagination and creative potential.



## **4. Effective Educators as Promoters for Better Learning Process**

Effective educators must understand a great deal about the process of individual student learning as well as how best to reach and motivate their students as a whole. This can seem at times like an overwhelming task on the part of teachers. Teaching is a multifaceted discipline which requires that one possess a great balance of knowledge, self-awareness, great social and emotional skills, kindness and selflessness, as well as a love for learning and teaching. Remarkably however, there are a great many educators who manage to do this with incredible skill. And research suggests that there are common characteristics and personality traits that these effective teachers all share.

At the heart of every good teacher, is a love and zest for learning and knowledge, as well as a deep desire and care for sharing in this knowledge. The art of effective teaching is a continual learning process for the teacher (Stronge, Hindman, & Tucker, 2004, p. 6). Most of us that choose to become educators want to be more than simply good teachers, we strive for greatness in our craft. It is known that the most effective teachers are passionate about teaching (Stronge et al., 2004, p. 29). Teachers come into their field with varying personal abilities and experiences gathered throughout their lives which can be classified as prerequisites to teaching (Stronge et al., 2004, p. 7); they are those qualities that make us who we are as individuals. That is, our gathered knowledge, experiences, interests and how we interact with those around us, how we process information, how we express ourselves, as well as our general outlook on life.

The main prerequisites thought to make for effective teachers are: good verbal and social abilities, high content knowledge, the interest in life-long learning and continued professional development, the ability to thoughtfully structure quality educational coursework for students, as well as those with proper teacher certification (Stronge et al., 2004, p. 7). In addition, more teaching experience an individual has had has also been seen influence their teacher effectiveness, particularly in areas of reflection, classroom management, planning, and the ability to draw out questions in students (Stronge et al., 2004, p. 7).

As a general rule, those teachers who are effective communicators will likely be more effective teachers (Stronge et al., 2004, p. 9). Furthermore, teachers who know their content well and are able to determine the essential knowledge and skills vital to understanding and mastery of the topic being taught in their instruction are associated with successful teaching; this relationship between teacher knowledge and student acquisition of knowledge makes sense (Stronge et al., 2004, p.10). “They can better convey their enthusiasm, understanding, and knowledge to students” (Stronge et al., 2004, p.10).

These attributes associated with academic based knowledge, prowess, and experience are all intrinsic to the makings of an effective teacher, but I would like to pay a closer look to the more personal and social side of the teacher. Knowing what to teach and how to organize and share information is indeed important. But a teacher must also know how to go beyond this instructional aspect of the job, to make students feel welcome, comfortable, and to be able to build rapport, as well as have an appropriate professional relationship with students. Studies have shown that when people recall their best teachers, they often recall how these teachers made them feel before they mention the content that was learnt. This is a subtle yet significant distinction (Stronge et al., 2004, p.30). A teachers interpersonal skills are key for developing a working environment that creates a positive climate for learning (Stronge et al., 2004, p. 30). This brings to mind a quote credited to Jim Henson that I once stumbled upon in my early years of teaching which struck me as poignant and that I circle back to in my interactions with children, “[Kids] don’t remember what you try to teach them. They remember what you are.”

Using AN techniques is one effective way for teachers to build this rapport with students by lightening the atmosphere of the classroom, provide an element of fun, as well as personalize lessons to create this positive climate for learning.

## 5. Global Challenges in Formal Education

Since the 1980's, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recognized and stressed the importance of a need for students to develop an interest in lifelong learning. The age-old conundrum of how to keep student's interested in learning and school has continued to be a challenge for teachers around the world (OECD, 2000, p.11). They noted that young children are naturally curious and interested in learning, however as students enter their teenage years, for many their drive for learning dwindles. This results in many students dropping out before the end of compulsory schooling, and many more show up to class in physical form but are not there in mind, which is arguably no different (OECD, 2000, p.11). This phenomenon is a global issue, as even Pacific Rim nations like Japan and Korea, which are two of the most academically successful countries, report that a great number of students are not satisfied with their high school lives and learning (OECD, 2000, p.11). The OECD educational ministers have emphasized that this goal for lifelong learning is imperative, and that it must remain at the top of national agendas. Furthermore, this goal can only be achieved if changes and firm foundations are laid in primary and secondary schools the world over (OECD, 2000, p.11).

However, uncovering how to keep students' zest for learning is no easy task. And even at their core, the terms "lifelong learning" and "motivating adolescents" can mean different things from country to country, or even from one institution to another within countries (OECD, 2000, p.46).

In both the East and West, it is an increasingly accepted philosophy that schools of all levels should provide learning environments where students enjoy being, and where they experience a sense of excitement, self-worth, as well as challenges in learning (OECD, 2000, p.22). One of the global challenges in education, even in nations as academically successful as Japan and Korea, is that individualism and creativity have not been sufficiently fostered (OECD, 2000, p. 22). There is an extraordinary challenge presented for educational systems worldwide, as a great deal of recent research in

education has suggested that in the near future many OECD countries will need to make radical changes in the way that students are taught and assessed (OECD, 2000, p. 22).

At the core of this challenge, teachers will need the support and ability to create more motivational school environments for children. There is no easy fix or set of tools that are universally accepted or shown to be motivational or helpful for all students, and on some level it seems like an impossible task for teachers to walk the perfect balance of the individual motivational and learning needs of every student. However, I suggest that using AN techniques in the classroom is one effective way to help motivate students and keep their zest for learning alive.

## **5.1 Some Problems with Traditional Teaching Methods**

“Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.” - H. G. Wells

Research spanning 25 years suggests a number of issues with instruction that follows the transmission model. It has been clear from this research that “wisdom can’t be told.” (Bransford & Stein, 1993, p. 197).

According to another researcher, teacher centered education systems produce “inert” knowledge- that is, knowledge that people can recall but can’t apply to problem solving (Bransford & Stein, 1993, p. 197). There is a great deal of research that supports the idea that a student’s familiarity with basic facts or isolated skills is not enough to help them learn or become effective problem solvers (Bransford & Stein, 1993, p. 197).

Bringing in problem solving solutions to teaching methods is not enough on its own, as research suggests that the problems need to be connected to the real world. Otherwise students will treat the problem solving task mechanically, and fail to recognize the application in a real-life setting (Bransford & Stein, 1993, p. 199).

Other short comings of non-genuine problem solving tasks, is that often the problem will require only that students retrieve information from previous chapters or course material, therefore they fail to be challenged with tasks that develop “a more intuitive and creative approach to problem solving” (Bransford & Stein, 1993, p. 199).

Another limiting factor is that these non-genuine problems or tasks tend to provide only one correct solution to the problem, which again is not very realistic. Bransford and Stein (1993) suggest “this can lead to misconceptions about the nature of problem solving and can inhibit creative thought” (p. 199).

Yet another limiting factor is that these made for school problems fail to allow students to do the major problem solving task, which is to identify that there is a problem to begin with, or rather to find the problem on their own (Bransford & Stein, 1993, p. 199).

Realistic problems can be approached from multiple perspectives or angles and therefore have a variety of solutions available, unlike most made for school problem solving tasks (Bransford & Stein, 1993, p. 199). I believe that using AN techniques in the classroom, in particular as the base of the lesson, is one incredibly effective way to develop realistic problem solving opportunities for students. Developing a lesson which is entirely about identifying a problem through some kind of detective work or activity that deviates from a traditional lecture based lesson on a given subject is far more effective than simply having a teacher up front listing facts and definitions. I will further discuss options for creating realistic opportunities for problem solving in chapter 7.

## **6. Transforming Education to Breed Creativity and Innovation**

Robinson (2011) suggests there are three major tasks educators need to focus on in teaching for creativity. Firstly, it is imperative that teachers encourage students to believe in their creative potential as well as to help nurture student confidence and willingness to try (Robinson, 2011 p.269). Secondly, teachers need to help students identify their personal creative strengths (Robinson, 2011 p.269). And thirdly, educators need to help foster and develop students' self-confidence and independence of mind so they have the capacity to think for themselves in order to help them develop skills and independent creative works (Robinson, 2011 p.269). He suggests this includes promoting the students' willingness to make mistakes, generate thoughts, express ideas and feelings, as well as to encourage playing with ideas or self- reflection and/or evaluation of their ideas (Robinson, 2011 p.269). The end goal is that educators help students prepare for independent thinking, so they have the capacity to tackle future problems and objectives (Robinson, 2011, p. 270-71). I am suggesting that AN teaching techniques allow for all of these opportunities to aid students. The central idea of this teaching method is that it allows educators to help build student confidence because it helps to create a positive atmosphere for learning with fun and enjoyment which in turn helps the students feel good about their time in the classroom and helps to lower their stress about learning, which in turn opens them up for a better learning experience.

## 7. Study Case: Applied Nonsense Teaching Philosophy

“A little nonsense now and then is relished by the wisest men.” –Roald Dahl

“More often than not the best sense is nonsense” –anonymous quote

When presenting information to students, whether it be the introduction of a new complex topic, a current event, a new formula to be learnt for maths, or a grammatical lesson for a foreign language, educators need to find a way to balance the factual and necessary information needed to make the topic clear while finding a way to make the information interesting and meaningful to students. To capture the interest of the students, the information needs to be made relevant, understandable, and hopefully enjoyable in some way.

This is where Applied Nonsense comes into play and I will try to help define and explain this teaching philosophy in this section. On the surface level, Applied Nonsense teaching technique is the occasional use of age-appropriate humor, or unexpected sometimes seemingly random materials to positively lighten the atmosphere of a classroom. The idea is to make the “nonsense content,” or rather the element of fun, relevant to the learning topic or environment to add another level of learning for students. It’s not enough to simply present facts or information, it is far more helpful for students’ ability to feel at ease and to be open to new ideas if the ideas are presented in a playful and pleasant manner. It is a technique that should be used when applicable and with fineness, and so it should not be overly used. There needs to be a subtle, controlled skill in the presentation of AN material for the method to be used wisely.

The content doesn’t necessarily only have to be in the medium of humor, it can also be playful ideas or concepts as well. The core idea here is to create a positive experience for the students in an attempt to help them store memories of the content in connection to the experience you are creating for them as a teacher.

On a deeper level, I also suggest that AN is then a teaching technique which focuses on flourishing the imagination, innovative thinking skills, and helps students to learn to develop flexible thinking skills and creativity. I’m suggesting that creative thinking is a

skill that can be learnt and taught through example and experiences given through AN teaching techniques. I feel that this idea is also backed by a great deal of research surrounding education, learning, creativity, and humor in the classroom presented in the Theory chapter of this thesis.

By presenting creative ideas and high-brow humor, and linking these content to topics, we teachers are able to help students learn to implement this skill by example. It takes time, energy, and creativity to develop this kind of lesson and material, but I am suggesting that this kind of method pays-off because this creative process is being learnt by example in addition to the direct teaching content.

Additionally, providing alternatives to traditional lecture based lessons fits in well with AN teaching philosophy. Creating lessons which are more playful in nature, and provide creative problem solving hands-on tasks are all a part of the nature of AN philosophy.

Creative, flexible thinking is a fundamental building block in problem solving and developing ideas and it is needed for innovation. If we focus education on developing this skill with linking interesting experiences and ideas through teaching, we can offer students more than just jamming them full of information they will likely forget. We can help give them skills they can actually use in life and that are much needed in today's evolving world. I'm suggesting that AN is a tool that can be used to help foster creative thinking skills in students. I will give some specific examples of AN teaching techniques later in this paper, with a focus on using them to teach English as a second language (ESL).

## **7.1 Core Goals of AN Philosophy**

The core goals of Applied Nonsense are: 1. To help students develop creative thinking and problem solving skills through using examples of creative innovative material in lessons or as the lesson itself. And 2. To help students develop a love for learning by adding a sense of 'play,' fun, or perhaps you could suggest entertainment, that engages them and keeps them interested in learning (usually via the medium of positive, age-appropriate humor). This method is one that can be used with any target age group, it just needs to be modified - the content then needs to be age-appropriately selected.



I feel that the trend in education is such that older students seem to experience AN methods less in the classroom. As students age, education becomes very serious; many educators are bogged down by a system which requires them to meet certain educational goals to prepare their students for high stakes exams, like the ACTs and SATs in the United States or the matriculation exam in Finland. My goal with this thesis is to encourage educators to use AN and take advantage of its benefits for these advanced level students because I feel strongly that using this teaching method helps to prepare students for learning by capturing their attention and aiding their ability to store information in long term memory by making the information meaningful and interesting. In particular, AN incorporates this idea of approaching subjects from an angle of *play*, even for advanced students.

## **7.2 Implementing AN in the Classroom: Examples of AN**

When there must be moments of teacher centered lecture or monologues, there must be moments of humor, creativity, fun, light-hearted ways of linking ideas to real life, or other larger concepts. Otherwise we will lose the students' attention. There are many practical ways that teachers can implement AN in the classroom.

As I suggested, AN is a technique that can be used as an aid to break-up traditional classroom lecture or then conversely it can be used as the main material of the lesson as a way to make some topic more interesting. In the following section I will give general ideas and tools for how to implement AN in the classroom and then more specific examples of how to use AN with regard to teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). I will also give some examples of how AN technique has been used in educational children's television programs. And I will also discuss possibilities for using AN as a way to enhance the aesthetics of a classroom environment as well as a way for teachers to personalize their teacher image and create a positive atmosphere in the classroom.

### **7.2.1 Traditional Methods of AN**

There are certain subjects which intrinsically use elements of AN technique as a major method of teaching. In particular many of the liberal arts subjects come to mind, like the

various branches of the visual arts or theatre. The very fabric of these subjects is visual, playful, relatable, personal, and enjoyable to the students who chose to study them. They provide students with the opportunity to use their imaginations, create something original, interact and bounce ideas around with fellow students, as well they are a great avenue for self - expression.

Similarly, the teaching practices of early childhood are brimming with AN examples, as the use of music, visuals, attention-grabbing and alternative methods for breaking-up information with elements of play or fun is the method by which young children learn and how they are taught.

In addition, I would suggest that the very nature of teaching the sciences has traditionally allowed for many opportunities to use AN teaching techniques because many of the complex concepts and ideas need to be visually explained, manipulated or experimented with.

Elements from arts education, sciences, and early childhood education can be used to enhance the teaching style for non –arts and science related subjects as well as the possibilities for learning in older students. Traditionally, these methods of AN have been carried over to other subjects when teachers provide opportunities for their students to create performances, develop some project, or experiment as part of the learning experience in the classroom as a way to break from everyday lecture style.

In addition, posters, visuals, projection screens, and adaptations of board games or original game ideas created for use in the classroom were commonly used to provide students with non-traditional visual stimulus, or elements of fun and “play” in the classroom before the introduction of computers and the internet. These methods of traditional uses of AN are still among some of the most effective and useful ways to engage and teach students; they are useful alternative tools to enhance learning and give students a much needed break from technology.

#### 7.2.2 The Internet and Educational Technology

The invention of the computer and moreover, the internet and modern technology has presented endless possibilities to use AN techniques in the classroom. With the use of the internet there are limitless opportunities to find images, memes, gifs, short videos,

audio clips, music, applications, games, etc. These are all examples of AN technique because they are visual and humorous, as well they can be used to link ideas and concepts in the subject in an interesting or thought provoking manner or in a playful way.

Because modern students are familiar with these types of visual expressions which are used regularly in social media as a way to creatively or humorously link ideas or get some message across clearly, cleverly, and quickly, using them in the classroom is a very effective way to enhance their learning. They are powerful and popular avenues for sharing ideas because images can say a lot and they grab our attention. They can make an impact on us or leave a lasting impression where a page of text or a long lecture discussion alone might be forgotten.

In addition, the internet provides educators with opportunities to develop interesting alternatives to traditional lecture based lessons. There are a great many websites like e.g. Kahoot! which is a game-based learning platform that allows teachers to create personalized interactive quizzes or trivia games for students to play as part of a lesson. Kahoot! is a great tool for using AN in the classroom, and is an effective way to take a break from a traditional classroom activity. If it is not overused, it provides a playful and fun learning experience for students.

### 7.2.3 AN in Children's Television Series: A Learning Tool

As a young child, I recall watching endless hours of a public access program known as *Sesame Street* which was a popular 1980's children's television program full of nonsense and humor. *Sesame Street* is the perfect example of some entity that teaches through this idea of Applied Nonsense. *Sesame Street* is an American educational children's television show that was developed in the late 1960's by Joan Ganz Cooney and Lloyd Morrisett both of whom held degrees in Education, Philosophy and Experimental Psychology. This television program has been recognized for successfully educating English speaking children for nearly 50 years. As a result, there have been many international co-productions and language adaptations of the series in many countries worldwide, and the original English program is still in production today.

The show creators combined puppetry, live action, animation, sketch comedy, and short films to teach children phonics, social and cultural skills, among other important lessons that are fundamental to early childhood education. The program also features Jim Henson's Muppets, which are a group of puppets/marionettes that he and his creative team *Muppets, Inc.* developed for commercial advertisements as well as for the *Sesame Street* television program. Since the development of *Sesame Street* many programs have followed suit, notably a clever and humorous show called *Yo Gabba!* from the television network Nickelodeon as well a number of English children's series featured on the BBC.

## 7.3 Examples of AN in the ESL Classroom for Young Learners

One example of AN that has been used as a tool for teaching phonics and reading to young learners of English is the work of Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known for his pen name "Dr. Seuss." Seuss was a 20<sup>th</sup> century North American children's book writer and illustrator, among other professions, and he was a master of using this idea of AN in his children's books. He created the perfect tool for teachers to teach early reading skills through nonsense and he developed a series of "easy readers" books which use very simple vocabulary for beginning readers. Moreover, Seuss used playful rhymes and simple sentences and illustrated and wrote about bizarre thought provoking made-up creatures. His books are filled with visually interesting illustrations. One of his best known "easy reader" works is a book called "Green Eggs and Ham." An interesting backstory about the creation of this book is that it is thought to have come about as the result of a bet between Seuss and his publisher. His publisher suggested that he couldn't write a full story with less than 236 words. Seuss not only proved his publisher wrong, "Green Eggs and Ham" was written with only 50 words, and it is delightfully funny and original.

### 7.3.1 Muzzy in Gondoland

During my teacher training, my ESL teacher mentor at a Finnish primary school in Espoo, Finland introduced me to *Muzzy in Gondoland* which is an educational ESL program she had been using for many years to help supplement the school's Finnish

ESL material. *Muzzy* is a television program created in 1986 for the BBC, and has since been updated and reworked. The original *Muzzy* series struck me as being a fantastic example of AN technique, similar to that of *Sesame Street*, but meant specifically for teaching grammar rules, vocabulary, and sentence structure to non-native speaking beginner students in English.

The story and characters are both original, creative, and comical, as well the program uses playful and fun elements to teach and engage young children. The students at the Finnish primary school responded favorably to the *Muzzy* teaching material and looked forward to their *Muzzy* morning lessons. Interestingly enough, the program is based on the writings and illustrations of Oxford graduate Diana Webster who worked for many years as a lecturer in English Language and Literature for the English Department at University of Helsinki. Webster has also been instrumental in the writings of a great many award-winning ESL textbooks for teaching English to young students in Finland and worldwide.

### 7.3.2 Sock Puppets Application

The “Sock Puppets” application or similar applications for phones, pads, and computers are yet another fantastic way to implement AN techniques in the classroom. These applications make a fun ESL assignment for young students. With this particular application students can create an animated sock puppet show dialogue in English. It’s a playful and visual way to get students to feel motivated to practice their spoken English skills and it allows beginning students to feel more at ease speaking English under the guise of a sock puppet. It is also a fun way to let students express their creativity and artistic side as the app allows them to design a stage, chose puppets, select voices, add music and/or props to the show. It is quick and easy to use so it can be used as part of a lesson, or it can be used in individual work or group work, or could even be given as a quick and fun weekend homework assignment. The application has a free option or then a more complete version is available for purchase which allows for more recording time and more freedom to manipulate the puppet show settings. It is also something that can be presented, saved, and shared with classmates in class. Additionally, the application has options for online sharing via YouTube or various social medias.

### 7.3.3 Kahoot! and Seppo

In my section about using computers and technology to implement AN I mentioned the use of websites like Kahoot! as a way to engage and motivate student learning. Another example of a website which allows for a slightly different AN experience is one called *Seppo*. *Seppo* is another innovative tool for developing educational games for students. It allows teachers to create complex games within the school or then in a location outside the school, say for a field trip to a museum or the city centre. The tool gives teachers the ability to choose the learning environment, and then the teacher creates a map which acts as the board game. The idea is for the teacher to develop a series of tasks that students can solve in teams using mobile devices and the teacher is able to monitor the game and student's progress, give immediate feedback, assistance, and assessment. It's a great way to get students to work together and practice spoken English skills and reading comprehension skills in English. Furthermore *Seppo* can be used for any age student, from preschool age to advanced University students. In addition, the program encompasses the heart of AN philosophy because it gives students the opportunity for creative problem solving and it inspires and motivates students to learn and play together in an experimental, project-based real life learning environment.

### 7.3.4 Creative Exercises in Writing

One AN technique that I have carried over from my personal experiences in language learning was something that my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher, Mrs. Heiden, imparted upon me. Mrs. Heiden used a technique for creative exercises in writing and learning grammar through a series empty books full of illustrations she provided for hers students to learn to write different sentence types. She would have her students build their English vocabulary as well as learn how to grammatically manipulate different simple and complex sentence structures in different tenses by having her class write stories. Over the course of a two year academic period, her main method of instruction was to provide her students with hand illustrated blank picture books that they were meant to write or weave a story around; the booklets were about 10 pages each.

Her 4<sup>th</sup> grade students were first given a book with pictures similar to those of E.B. White's "Charlotte's Web" with illustrations of a little girl and a little pig. I remember each book to be an incredibly fun project. It involved a creative writing process, which

allowed for practice using and manipulating sentences and grammar, provoked a desire for self-assessment and a need to learn to edit our work for the final written copy, as well as an opportunity to practice good penmanship in the final book. Additionally, it allowed students the opportunity to design and make a book cover as well as color the pictures she had illustrated on each page.

By 5<sup>th</sup> grade we were given more complex tasks, like my personal favorite, a book of inventions in which she provided drawings of make-believe machines that we were meant to design a function for, as well as completely blank pages in which we had to fully design the machines, visually and in function. And another favorite storybook idea she created, was a book of pretend nonsense creatures she had illustrated that we needed to name and explain. Again the last pages of the book were left blank for students to draw and create their own creatures. Over the course of my two years in Mrs. Heiden's English class, I had written a dozen books which are lovely keepsakes of my primary school growth and imagination. Not to mention, it flourished my love and interest in writing and in storytelling. It was such a fun and memorable way to practice using grammar and sentences in English and the method proved so popular and effective that she repeated the same teaching structure for decades. As well, she was in her own way a legend in our primary school; young students couldn't wait to reach 4<sup>th</sup> grade so they could experience her English classes. Although her English classes were meant for "native" learners of the language, I have found that the technique is equally effective and meaningful for the ESL classroom. It is also a technique that can be easily and successfully carried over from primary school to more advanced students.

## **7.4 Additional AN English Grammar Lessons for Advanced Students**

For ESL teachers, there is a much needed emphasis on teaching students English grammar skills. For a great many students, the task of manipulating and learning English grammar is a necessary but tedious one. The teaching of any language can be challenging because motivating students and inspiring them with grammar rules is not an easy task. However, there is always a playful and less painful way to present even seemingly mundane tasks like learning grammar rules. I suggest that applying AN

techniques to teach ESL can actually make learning grammar somewhat fun and instantaneously rewarding.

If a teacher is faced with the need to have students learn certain parts of speech, one way to implement AN techniques to motivate students to parse sentences is to give them unexpected and interesting things to parse. The sentence examples that are given for parsing can be a source to engage students in the activity. They can be e.g. humorous excerpts from the news, jokes, or sentences that are just ridiculous statements. One example of a ridiculous sentences that could be used in such a grammar lesson is e.g. *One morning I fed an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I'll never know.* For the advanced English student, teachers can insert comical options like this difficult sentence for parsing, which is surprisingly grammatically correct: *Buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo.* The idea is that the material can be manipulated in an age appropriate way to make this mundane exercise more enjoyable. If the reading material is humorous, then the students will arguably enjoy or feel more motivation to manipulate the sentences. I know this to be true from my own experiences with parsing sentences as an advanced English student, when a quirky University English professor of mine presented just such material. It was a delightful surprise to find that the grammar material we used for learning complex grammar structures and parts of speech throughout the semester long class were thoughtfully selected articles and stories. As much as the parsing itself was less than thrilling and was rather challenging at times, I found myself willing and driven to take on the next assignment just so I could read the material. And when I needed to recall the complex structures I had something meaningful or funny to think back upon and remember how it was used and what it meant. This is precisely the intended idea with the use of AN methods.

#### 7.4.1 Games

Playing games to break up English lessons is another helpful way to implement AN in the classroom for older students as well. In a previous chapter I mentioned using the websites Kahoot! and Seppo, as well there are a great many other online interactive and team building games available for teachers to create alternative playful English lessons for students. But adapting traditional board games which play with words,



communication, or discussion are also meaningful ways to help motivate language practice and learning for advanced students.

One classroom game adaptation that I have used several times when teaching ESL with high school and University aged students is from a board game called *Balderdash*. The idea is to give the students real but obscure English words that no one has ever heard of and have the students create false definitions for the words. The idea is for the students to create a definition that sounds convincing to other players and their task is to “sell” their made up definition as the real definition. It makes for a fun, interactive group activity or full classroom activity and it is a great way to help increase student vocabulary, as well as a fun way to get them to practice their spoken English skills with each other. Moreover, it promotes the development of team working skills.

Another great example of a game that implements AN technique that has proven successful for practicing spoken language skills is an ice breaking party game that is most commonly known as *The Name Game* or *Who Am I?* This game is particularly helpful for young adults to practice their spoken English skills which is a tricky part of foreign language teaching/learning. The use of this game is a great way for teachers to create a playful and safe environment to motivate students to speak. The idea behind the game is to give the students each a card with the name of a fictional or non-fictional character or e.g. a famous iconic individual, or storybook character, and the students are to place their character card on their forehead for other players to see without looking at their own card. The players then ask a series of “yes” or “no” questions until they are able to work out which character card they have been given, or rather who they are in the game. I have found this game to be particularly popular amongst high school students and it is a good way to open up communication especially amongst those students who are shy and reserved. It is easy and quick for teachers to create a version of the game and it can be used as part of a literary lesson or to practice specific sentence structures or use of current vocabulary words, for example. Furthermore, it is a highly adaptable game so it can be used with all ages and it can be specifically tailored for age groups or topics.

## **7.5 AN in the Classroom Aesthetics**

I am also suggesting that Applied Nonsense teaching philosophy can and should carry over to the classroom decoration and aesthetics as well. Preschool classrooms and primary school classrooms embrace this idea regularly. The classrooms in early childhood education are great examples of visual presentations of learning materials and are often thoughtfully presented and meant to be stimulating environments which offer young students materials and visuals to explore and learn from. However, as students age into high school, much in a similar way as the lack of playfulness involved in classroom learning, these teachers seem to place less effort and focus on classroom aesthetics, and I find this to be unfortunate. With that said most science classrooms, namely Biology, Chemistry, and Physics classrooms/laboratories do a great job presenting materials and visual stimulus for older students, as often visual representations are helpful for learning complex scientific processes and help students grasp and visualize concepts.

Regardless of a student's age or the teaching subject, the classroom should be a place that visually invites curiosity and engages the students. There are limitless ways to make this happen, from inspirational materials to visuals that help student's grasp concepts, to humorous quotes, or signs which might ignite thoughtful discussion, or unusual thought provoking artwork, etc. The classroom can tell an open ended story which invites students to engage with.

In addition, there can be useful props that the teacher can have around which brings an element of fun and humor to the classroom. In the United States there are a great many junior high and high school teachers who have embraced the trend of creating a humorous hallway or bathroom pass for students, which is needed to walk the hallways in US schools during class period times if a student should need to use the rest room. Teachers have found humorous ways to persuade students to use the toilet between classes if possible and not waste time leaving the classroom during lessons by providing them with awkward or silly things they need to bring with them to the toilet. Some teachers have used giant cardboard cut outs of celebrities, or a huge pumpkin for example. The item could even have some connection to the teaching subject, like a Physics teacher might make a hall pass out of an Einstein doll.

Furthermore, with regard to full classroom aesthetics, the music classroom at Kulosaari Secondary School in Espoo, Finland comes to mind as I recently visited their school and had the opportunity to sit in for some music lessons. Their music room and teacher has fully embraced AN techniques in his classroom. The school has recently renovated the music room, so the architecture, floor plan, and design elements of the classroom are all intriguing and well thought out and so the room is truly an ideal classroom environment for their students. Aesthetically it is a beautiful classroom full of instruments which are placed about the space in thoughtful ways to help invite the students to experiment with. As well, the classroom is equipped with new technological gadgets, visual screens, speakers and sound proofing so the teacher has been provided with the tools and space needed to help make his classroom an inviting, comfortable, and stimulating place to be. In addition to this lovely space, the music teacher has thoughtfully placed playful elements around his classroom to add another layer of interest and to personalize his space. He has placed a large metal remote control robot toy over his desk, and in the transparent bass drum sits a large Star Wars X-wing plane stuffed toy. There are also other pop culture and popular music related toys and gadgets he has sprinkled around his classroom to help make the space fun and interesting to his students. He has also placed useful posters of guitar notes which are meant to be visual guides for students practicing guitar. And his selection of songs for students to practice learning to play on various instruments are modern radio friendly songs that are meaningful and enjoyable for the students to learn. In addition, the teacher looks the part of a musician as he could easily be mistaken for a band member of some modern rock or alternative music band, with his long curly modern hair and his dress style and fashion sense.

## **7.6 The Teacher as an Extension of AN**

With the music teacher at Kulosaari in mind, the teacher's appearance and mannerisms and personal style can be used to help intrigue students. Of course teachers should be genuine to themselves and dress and act in a way that is true to their person, but it is possible to keep in mind that one can inspire children through one's personality, especially if one happens to have some eccentricities that they feel comfortable sharing and are playfully positive or appropriate for the classroom.

For example, I often think of my 8<sup>th</sup> grade Physics teacher Mr. Price who looked quite much like Albert Einstein and he used this to his advantage as a Physics teacher. He was clever enough to decorate his classroom with photos and large posters of Einstein. I think he even intentionally kept his hair in a messy Einstein fashion and selected his school wardrobe based on Einstein's photos. Mr. Price's commitment to "pretending" to be Einstein was great fun for his students. At least for me I can say that it added another level of excitement to my introduction to Physics. It was a clever way to introduce his young students to Einstein and his ideas and to spark our love and curiosity with the subject. Additionally, Mr. Price stands out in my memory as one of my most interesting and memorable teachers.

## **7.7 Drawbacks and Possible Downfalls of AN**

I acknowledge that AN may not be everyone's "cup of tea" so to speak. There are always going to be some young adults and adults who are very serious minded and dislike "playful" content or ideas. However, I raise the question of why? Because I have never met a child who isn't ready for a fun and playful experience. Perhaps if we caught these very serious minded people early enough in life and in their education and introduced some humor into their lives throughout their formal education, they would be happier people for it. Perhaps they could be more playful, or at least maybe they would be more open to playfulness. Perhaps the reason these serious individuals are so serious has partly to do with a lack of positive experiences with playful content during their transition from childhood into young adulthood? Not that everyone should or must retain a childlike exuberance for life, certainly we need people in life who are prepared to think and act in serious ways, and there are certainly moments when seriousness is needed and one cannot think playfully. However, with that said, there are so many serious situations in life that could use more playful and flexible ways of going about or solving problems, and this is where the idea of creativity and innovation come into play. One needs to have a playful mentality to embark on creative or innovative endeavors and most important jobs and roles in society depend on innovation and the ability to think outside the box.

Another issue that arises for the use of AN in the classroom is that if it doesn't feel natural for a teacher to implement the method, it is likely then going to be difficult for a teacher to use this method.

The method is also very open to interpretation and may be difficult for some people to fully grasp, particularly for these more serious minded individuals. There are seemingly endless ways in which to implement and personalize this method of teaching. There are seemingly endless possibilities to present fun, playful opportunities and materials to students. And depending on how you look at it, this can be either advantageous or perhaps overwhelming. These limitless possibilities for AN are beneficial for obvious reasons, but also potentially perplexing because the method for implementing this teaching philosophy many not be clear to everyone. Moreover, as with all things, there are arguably successful and skillful ways to implement AN and conversely there are less successful or unhelpful ways of using the technique. In particular, if the "nonsense" material is not relevant and meaningful to the learning material or topic it can be an unnecessary distraction and potentially have the opposite effect on student learning.

Furthermore, as suggested previously, this teaching style could arguably not appeal to all students, particularly young adults who are more serious minded. But with that said, there is no one teaching philosophy or personality that works perfectly for every student or every teacher. Furthermore, there are aspects of this teaching philosophy that can be applied to all types of lessons and that are hopefully "universally" understood and accepted amongst modern teachers. My idea is that there are aspects of this philosophy that can be used successfully by every educator and that there are aspects that benefit every student, at least on some level.

It is good to keep in mind that we teachers learn through our own experimentation as educators. There is no such thing as failure, because we learn from everything that doesn't go 100% the way we hoped in the classroom. No matter how long a teacher has been teaching, there is always something to be learnt, there is always room for improvement; and there will be great days and not so great days. We arguably never reach our full potential as educators.

With this in mind, sometimes a teacher's attempt to use humor in the classroom might miss its mark. . . Students might find something the teacher has presented "cheesy" or perhaps "unbearable." One would hope that teachers who use AN and present these personalized "jokes" are prepared for potential student eye-rolls and sighs of disbelief. A teacher might in fact even use this to their advantage, it might even be done every once in a while with intention, because again the idea behind using AN techniques is to make the information memorable to students, even if the memory carries with it an air of "I can't believe how incredibly horrid that was!"

Furthermore, I feel that making attempts to add humor creates a sense of rapport and trust between the teacher and most students, as well it makes the classroom environment more laid back and less intimidating to those students who might find the subject challenging. It is important, however, to keep in mind that it could also serve as a means of irritation or distraction to some students, particularly for those students whose ego or sense of self-confidence is sensitive or subject to peer pressure or judgement. With this in mind, AN highlights the need and importance for teachers to know their students and the dynamics of the student interactions in their classrooms well, so they are aware whether they feel this sort of technique could be beneficial for overall student learning.

## **8. Research Methods**

For my research I chose to use a questionnaire in survey form to collect the opinions of both students and teachers attitudes and feeling about the use of Applied Nonsense in the classroom environment. I wanted to get some idea if humor and the use of AN was generally appreciated by most students as a way to help them learn. Moreover, I wanted to have some idea if teachers are keen to use or do use this method as part of their teacher tool kit.

I chose to do a two-part anonymous questionnaire, cross-sectional survey to have a better understanding of student and teacher attitudes.

It is important to note that as the sole researcher for this project, I am aware that my position as a teacher and my ideas and biases about teaching affect the way I made this survey, the way I formatted the questions, and how I interpreted the results.

### **8.1 Student Respondents**

Because I wanted to have an idea about the general attitude towards AN in the classroom, I realized it was important to ask some current students their thoughts and opinions about the teaching method; that is, whether they like the idea of AN as a learning tool in the classroom, and then to further uncover whether their current teacher(s) use the teaching method, whether any of their past teachers have used these teaching techniques, and how frequently they would say the teaching method has been used as a learning tool in their education as a whole. The idea was to gain some insight into their experiences as learners and to understand a little about the history of their education regarding this topic. I wanted to see if there was some correlation between their experiences with AN and their feelings about the teaching method. I hypothesized that those students who had been exposed to AN early on in their education and had

continued to have exposure to the teaching techniques via certain teachers who used AN would then enjoy the teaching techniques and therefore find AN meaningful and helpful to their learning processes.

In addition, I wanted to see if there was some correlation between an individual's exposure to AN and their thoughts, feelings, and confidence about their own abilities to think creatively and to tackle obstacles with creative problem solving skills. My hypothesis was that the more an individual encountered AN the more confident they would be about their creative problem solving skills and creativity, and that they would both find greater joy and ease with creative projects or enterprises. That is, greater exposure to AN in their education would coincide with individuals identifying themselves as creative people.

The majority of the students in my study were from Mattlidens lukio, a Swedish speaking high school in Espoo, Finland. The students' age range was between 15-18 years of age. They were enrolled in the school's International Baccalaureate (IB) program, so their language of instruction was English. Some of the younger students involved in my study were a part of the pre- IB program, as they were first year lukio students. It is important to note that these students in my study are not very good representatives of the average national side lukio student in Finland. The IB programs have limited enrollment and a rigorous selection process, meaning the students have high grade point averages and are among the top performing students in Finland. They are also from a rather international background, many of which belonged to the Swedish-Finnish community in Finland, and many had come from abroad or had at least one parent who was not from Finland.

I had the opportunity to work with these lukio students at Mattlidens for part of my advanced practice during my teacher training and so I was able to give them the two part survey as part of two separate lessons I planned and taught. The study took place during the spring semester of 2018.

The remainder of the students in my study were random acquaintances from the United States who agreed to partake in the survey process. I managed to recruit them via social media (Facebook) and sent them the survey package, including detailed instructions, an



attached PowerPoint presentation on Applied Nonsense, and links to both survey via email. There were only two students from the United States who agreed to partake in the survey process. As I was not able to present the Applied Nonsense presentation that I had given to the Matliden's students in person to these US students, I modified the PowerPoint so that it was more thorough, and explained the parts of the presentation that were previously spoken. These two students were born between the years 1970-1990 so they were not current students.

## **8.2 Teacher Respondents**

The other main respondent group in my research were teachers.

I hypothesized that the teachers who responded most favorably to "The Page Turner" video in the first part of the survey, would likely be those teachers who say they use AN as part of their teacher tool kit. I was curious to see if there was a correlation between their positive reaction to the short film and their frequency of using AN in their classrooms. Moreover, I was curious to see if those teachers who use AN in their own classrooms experienced AN as a part of their own education; I was expecting to find a correlation between the frequency of AN in their education to their positive attitude and willingness to use AN as part of their teaching method. That is, those teachers who learnt through AN would be more willing and likely to use AN in their own teaching.

I was also curious to see if the teacher's opinions about their own creativity and creative problem solving skills had some correlation to their experiences with AN in their education. Again, I hypothesized that those teachers who learnt through AN would both enjoy creative endeavors and would find creative problem solving both a fun challenge and that they are good at doing these types of brain exercises; that is, they find more ease with creative problem solving than those teachers who have had little experience with AN as part of their education.

One of the main reasons that I feel AN is a fundamental method for teachers to use in the classroom is that I am suggesting it can help students develop their creative problem solving skills. I am suggesting that teachers can help their students develop creative problem solving skills and creativity by showing examples of creative thinking via AN

method. Furthermore, I think that it is arguable that individuals can learn to appreciate creativity and creative problem solving through their exposure to the AN teaching techniques. That is, I am arguing that we can teach people to develop creative thinking skills and problem solving skills by example and by presenting them with tasks and lessons which facilitate this kind of thinking.

### **8.3 AN Survey Part I: The Page Turner Video**

The Applied Nonsense Survey Part I was designed around a two minute video called “The Page Turner.” This video is available for preview in the link provided for AN Survey Part I in Appendix 1.1.

I was searching for some entity or example of Applied Nonsense that would capture the essence of the teaching method in a self-explanatory, visual way. This video is the quintessential example of AN. It is an example of AN itself as something that could potentially be used as a tool for adding humor to e.g. a very obvious Physics lesson on kinetic energy, or perhaps a critical thinking lesson for engineer students on the importance of building/designing machines in simple, useful ways; the opposite of a Rube Goldbergian machine. Moreover, the video captures the heart of the idea of doing something that seems pointless, but has a variety of intended purposes, much like what I am purposing as the method behind the madness of AN theory.

“The Page Turner” video is based on a machine designed by Rube Goldberg, the Pulitzer Prize winning 19<sup>th</sup> century engineer/inventor/cartoonist who was best known for creating complicated chain reaction gadgets that perform simple tasks in a series of indirect, labyrinthine ways. His machines were so popular during his lifetime that they gave rise to the term “Rube Goldberg Machines” for any similar chain reaction machine or gadget. His machines did very simple things in very complex ways.

“The Page Turner” machine and video were made by Joseph Herscher, a kinetic artist from New Zealand who specializes in building humorous chain reaction machines and has brought to life several of Rube Goldberg’s original design ideas. This page turning video starts off with Joseph reading a newspaper at a messy table full of gadgets with a series of strange objects surrounding him. As he takes a sip from his coffee mug, the

mug is attached to a string which sets off the chain reaction machine; a pencil holding-up a lopsided picture frame falls, the photo frame then shifts, sending a ball towards another pencil, and so on. There are a series of humorous, complex happenings within the chain reaction, like objects falling haphazardly from other objects, chemical reactions ignited by fire, steam shifting objects, etc. All of the individual happenings in the machine's chain reaction are extremely messy and unnecessary, and are far more complex than the actual needed outcome from the machine, which is to turn the page of his newspaper one single turn. My particular favorite happening in the chain reaction is the one left to the will of a live hamster, who is hopefully excited enough by the sound and heat of a hair dryer to move across a platform. The hamster's movement then sets his cage off balance sending a ball in motion, causing the next link in the reaction to take place, which then ultimately leads to the newspaper page turning one page so Joseph can continue with his read, which is then the end of the short film.

Clearly, this video must have taken many days of trial and error, set-up preparation and several dozen attempts to get the shot right, if for no other reason than the need to get the hamster to cooperate in the function. To turn the page of a newspaper takes on average less than 2 seconds, and requires very little caloric energy to accomplish on the part of the person reading the paper. However, the process of designing the machine, collecting the objects needed for the machine, setting up/building the machine, testing the machine, and filming the process to get the machine to function properly takes an absurd amount of time to turn the page of a newspaper, which is ultimately what is so comically genius about the whole video. As a result, I feel this video very justly and aptly embodies this idea of Applied Nonsense, which is why I chose to use it in my survey process.

#### 8.3.1 AN Survey Part I: Design Process

My idea for Part I of the survey design was to get some idea how people respond to "The Page Turner" video. Because I felt that it embodied the essence of AN, my idea was that if people responded favorably to the video there would be some correlation to their openness and/or desire to have something similarly fun, or humorous in the classroom as a way to help facilitate their learning. Although I hypothesized that the majority response to the video would be favorable or then neutral, I wanted to get some

idea about the number of individuals that were either offended, annoyed or otherwise responded negatively to the video. I did not expect to find many individuals who were put-off by the video, as the nature of the video is arguably “likeable.” However, I did expect to find a few people who are perhaps more serious minded and who don’t appreciate nonsense and therefore did not appreciate the short film. I assumed due to the nature of the extreme sense of unnecessary nonsense in this video, it would work well to naturally single out those people who just plain dislike silliness. I hypothesized that those individuals who really disliked this video would also not appreciate or be open to the use of AN in the classroom, and therefore would arguably find the teaching method irritating or distracting, especially when not used with care and finesse on the part of the teacher. Because I feel strongly that this teaching method is beneficial or neutral\* for most students, I wanted to be able to have some evidence to back up my ideas, and to get some idea from this small test group about the number of students who felt they would not benefit from the teaching method. \*By “neutral” I mean that AN does not affect their learning in a positive or negative way.

In Survey Part I, I asked the students and teachers to watch “The Page Turner” video and then answer a series of questions about how the video made them feel. Furthermore, I asked questions which probed for ideas about whether the students and teachers have had some experience with any of their past educators using any method of humor, like this page turning video, in any of their lessons to help break-up lecture or to help make the class enjoyable. The idea behind the survey was to gain some idea how many of the students and teachers feel they have experienced AN in action, and then whether it was something they felt positively about, or whether it was something they responded negatively to. In addition for teachers, I wanted to gain some idea if they use this method as part of their teaching style.

### 8.3.2 Paper Survey

The first part of the survey, which I refer to as “Survey Part I” was first given to the students and teachers at Mattliden in a paper and pencil format. Examples of the paper survey are available for viewing in Appendix 2; there is one example survey filled out by a student in Appendix 2.1 and one example filled out by a teacher in Appendix 2.2. There were 11 questions in this first version of the survey. The first question in the

survey asked the person's gender identity (leaving possibility for "other" keeping in mind that some persons might identify as some third gender identity) and whether they were a student or a teacher. So this first survey was made for both students and teachers. The questions were in the form of: multiple choice, true/false, yes/no, either/or, and open-ended questions. Some of the questions had multiple parts, and required the students/teachers to better explain their answers. There were three teachers who took part in the survey at Mattlidens during this first survey run.

I used the same paper survey for a small group of STEP students (Subject Teacher Education Program in English) at University of Helsinki. The student teachers were presented with the video and paper survey during my presentation on Applied Nonsense as part of our "Teacher as a Researcher" course. There were 12 student teachers who partook in the survey.

### 8.3.3 Moving AN Survey Part I Online

Through the use of Google Forms website, I developed an online version of my original paper survey as a way to make my survey available to teachers and students abroad as well as to help record and analyze the data; Google Forms has a program which automatically distributes and charts data for data analysis, so this was very helpful.

I made some small adjustments to the online version of the survey, by way of adding one extra question for students and three extra questions for teachers. For both students and teachers, I added a question which gave some approximate age of the respondent, by listing which decade they were born within, and then for the teacher part of the survey, I added the following two questions: the number of years the teachers had been teaching, as well as the subject(s) the teachers had been teaching. I added these questions because I realized it would be interesting to see if there would be some correlation between generation and response to AN and whether teacher experience or subject affected their attitudes and usage of AN. At the time I formatted the survey questions, I was hopeful that I would find enough respondents from different generations to fill out the survey process to make the data useful for my study results.

In order to chart and graph the results found from the paper survey filled out at University of Helsinki and Mattlidens, I needed to transfer those survey results online.

For the students, this was a simple process of filling out the survey verbatim and then filling in the approximate age range of 15-18 which I made possible in the survey question, as all of the students who partook in the survey were within this age range. But for the teacher survey, it was a more complicated situation as I then had to have the same teachers fill out the survey a second time online, to make up for the missing questions in the paper version.

## **8.4 AN Survey Part II: The PowerPoint Presentation**

This second part of my survey was designed around a 14 slide PowerPoint presentation explaining Applied Nonsense teaching theory in full. The PowerPoint presentation slides are available for viewing in Appendix 3. The presentation discussed how and why I developed the theory, explained my thoughts on how it facilitates learning in the classroom environment, and also gave a few examples of AN theory. In short, the PowerPoint was a brief summary of my thesis topic.

For the lukio students at Matlilidens and for the student teachers at University of Helsinki, I was able to present the PowerPoint in a 10 minute lecture format. For those students and teachers who participated in my study from the United States, I emailed them a more comprehensive PowerPoint presentation to be read individually. The downside to not being present for the PowerPoint presentation to these respondents from abroad was that they were not able to ask me direct questions or clear up any confusions about the teaching theory. I realized however that the understanding of AN was left to the respondent's own interpretation anyhow, whether I was present or absent during the PowerPoint; their understanding and responses in the survey would reflect their comprehension of the topic. My goal was to present AN theory as simply and comprehensively as possible so that the respondents' responses in the survey would reflect their genuine feeling about the theory.

After the PowerPoint presentation was either heard or read through, the students and teachers were then provided with a link to my online survey. Survey Part II was designed in Google Forms and was available only online. The survey was set up to take respondents to a series of questions that were best applicable for their answers; there were several questions in the survey which would redirect the respondents to another

series of questions. There were several main questions that sent respondents on different question paths. As a result, the respondents answered a different number of questions based on their answers. I will further explain my reasoning for each of these redirecting questions and the directed line of questioning that followed these questions.

The first question that was critical for interpreting the data results was whether the respondent was filling in the survey from the perspective of a student or teacher.

#### 8.4.1 AN Survey Part II: Student Survey Design

When the respondent filled in the student checkbox, the students' line of questioning lead to a series of questions which asked both their gender identity and age, whether they understood the AN theory based on the PowerPoint presentation, that is, was the presentation of AN teaching theory understandable and clear to them. It was important to know if they felt they understood the teaching theory to gage whether they were able to express their accurate feelings about the teaching method.

Furthermore, my line of questions tried to pinpoint how much exposure and experience the students had in their education as a whole with AN; whether or not they had experienced this teaching method in practice at any point in their education, how often they experienced this theory in practice, and then at what levels of their education they experienced this teaching method. And then finally, I developed questions to gauge whether or not they felt the teaching method would or does help them learn, as well as whether or not they would be open to their teachers using the teaching method with more frequency in the future.

I hypothesized that most of the students would answer that they felt they have had at least one teacher throughout their educational experience who had implemented the AN techniques in the classroom. However, I created a line of questioning for those students who felt they had never been exposed to AN in the classroom environment. This line of questioning also asked similar questions about whether they would be open to the method being used and whether they thought based on the PowerPoint presentation that the method might be helpful for their learning.

#### 8.4.2 Teacher Survey Design

For those individuals who filled the survey from the perspective of a teacher, I felt it was important to ask these same questions that I had asked the student respondents about their education and experiences with AN when they were students; the teachers were asked to answer these same questions about their time as students.

I then developed a separate line of questions for the teachers to probe whether or not their experiences with AN in their own education or lack there-of, affected their attitude and use of AN as part of their personal teaching philosophy. I then went on to ask whether they felt they used AN as part of their teacher tool kit, how often they thought they implemented the method, whether or not they felt they used the method spontaneously, and/or then whether they did a considerable amount of planning before they used the method. Even though AN as a term was new to the teachers, I felt that because it is a teaching method that has been used in a nameless way for many decades, that most of the teachers would identify with the techniques I proposed as encompassing AN. For those teachers who felt they didn't use the method or had never experienced this type of teaching philosophy, I asked them to explain why they didn't use it and then probed to find if my PowerPoint presentation introduced them to these teaching techniques, and whether they would be willing to use this method of teaching in the future, now that it had been introduced to them.

The final question in the survey presented to the teachers asked whether or not they felt the PowerPoint presentation and the two part survey process influenced their ideas about using "Applied Nonsense"; that is, did the presentation and survey influence them in a positive way? I felt this question was significant because it would give me some idea if I had been able to explain and express the teaching method comprehensively as well as give me some idea then if the majority of teachers agree or disagree with AN as being a useful tool for helping students learn.

Most of the questions asked in the second part of this survey were multiple choice, but several of these questions additionally asked for open ended answers so the students and teachers could better explain what they meant by their answers. For example when asking students and teachers if they felt AN was a teaching method that would help them learn, they were given six choices for answers ranging from "absolutely" to



“neutral” to “no, this method would irritate or distract me”. The second part of this question then asked them to further explain their answer in an open-ended format where they could type a detailed explanation. I felt it was important to try to understand any nuances in the respondent’s answers, which is why I designed these telling questions in this manner. I hypothesized that most of the teachers would have been exposed to AN in some manner throughout some period of their education. I also felt there would likely be some correlation between their own use of the teaching techniques and their experiences with AN in their own education.

## 9. Analysis and Discussion of the Data and Research Results

As with any survey process the results are left to interpretation, and as such are not always clear, particularly when dealing with young students under the eye of peer pressure in a classroom setting. My survey results were in a sense at the mercy of the student's willingness to answer the questions in-full and to take the survey process seriously. With that said, most of the students seemed to give honest answers and took the time to thoughtfully answer the survey. It should be noted however that there were a few students who took the survey who seemed less than eager to spend a lot of time pondering the answers to some of the questions or then they didn't take the time to explain themselves well in the short answer questions, saying instead things like e.g. "No" or "I don't know, man" as their response to why they felt AN would be helpful for their learning.

In addition, although the teachers who took part in my survey were more aware of the importance behind the survey process and therefore I trust that they took the survey process seriously, it should be noted that I am aware that their answers to the survey process are also subject to their individual interpretation of AN theory, and I have to assume that most of them understood the Power Point presentation and have some general understanding of what I mean by AN teaching philosophy. With this in mind, I am aware that the survey process and my research findings are subject to many layers of interpretation and might not be fully reliable; I am aware that I am trying to interpret their interpretation of my PowerPoint presentation of AN.

Furthermore, I tried to gain some understanding of whether the respondents had some experience with AN in their own education process. For some respondents, in particular the teachers, it required that they have some memory of their education and then to try to remember specifically if they encountered AN in their schooling and then at which specific times in their schooling. I realized this was asking a lot of my respondents and that the results might be subject to false memories or then "guessing" as not all individuals have vivid memories of their past/education.

## 9.1 Analysis and Results for AN Survey Part I

There were 56 respondents who partook the AN Survey Part I. Of these, 38 (57.9%) identified as female and 18 (32.1%) identified as male. For this first survey 27 (48.2%) respondents were students and 29 (51.8%) were teachers. There is a link provided in Appendix 1.1 where AN Survey Part I and the data results are available for viewing and review.

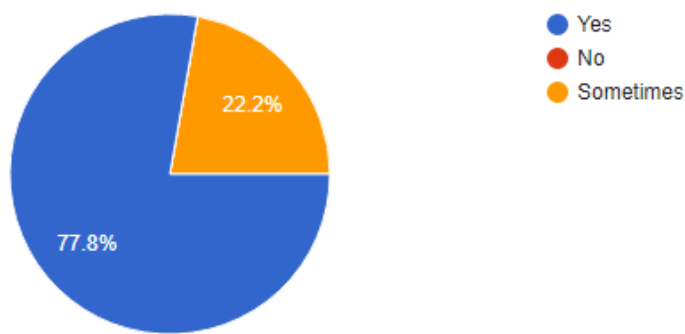
### 9.1.1 Student Results and Discussion for AN Survey Part I

There were 27 student respondents who partook in the first AN survey. All but two of the student respondents were current lukio students from Matliden's IB program. The other two students were born between the years 1970-1980. Of the student respondents, 18 identified as female and nine identified as male. I had hoped to have a more equal representative of both genders in my survey, however there were a greater number of female students enrolled in the IB program at Matliden's, so this was the natural outcome. Additionally, it would have been beneficial to have had more students from different high schools and classes involved in the study, but it was not possible to arrange for this due to time constraints.

Furthermore, I had hoped to involve more respondents who were currently not students, more specifically, students from previous generations, to get some idea if their reactions and attitudes to the video and AN teaching style would differ from those of the current generation. However, this proved to be difficult to find willing participants as when I went to analyze the data from this online survey I realized I only managed to conjure two willing older participants. So in the process, it seems I simply forgot to implore more acquaintances to fill out the survey and so this demographic was unfortunately not well represented in my study.

The most notable findings from the student survey results were to the question: "In your experiences as a student, have you enjoyed when your teachers have shown similar "nonsense" videos or have otherwise implemented some form of silliness/fun into a classroom lesson that has had relevance to the topic?" as illustrated in Figure 1 below. This question was meant to bring to mind the video example they watched before filling out the survey, and whether or not they enjoyed the use of humor and fun in their school

lessons. At this point in the survey process, the respondents had no idea or knowledge about AN theory, as this first part of the survey was not meant to explain AN. So I found that perhaps some of the respondents focused their answers more about the idea of teachers using videos in general as the main idea of this question; many of the respondents missed the connection I was trying to make with the use of other related humorous or light hearted content in place of a video. I tried to make the question clear, however the answers led me to believe that many respondents (both teachers and students) missed the bigger picture of this question. With that said, I don't feel it had a major effect on the results I was hoping to generate from this question, which was to find that most respondents found the use of humorous and light hearted content to be helpful or positive in the classroom environment.



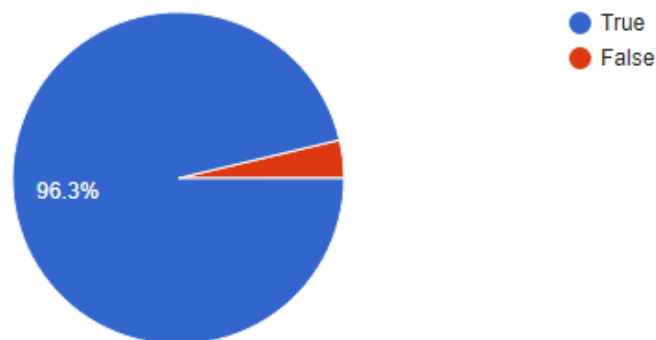
**Figure 1.** Pie chart which illustrates the percentage of students who enjoy meaningful humor and nonsense videos in the classroom.

There were four possible answers to this question: “yes,” “sometimes,” “no,” and “other.” Of the 27 student respondents, 21 of them answered “yes” to this question and six students answered “sometimes.” Not a single student answered “no.” I felt that the answers to this question reflected modern student’s interests and lives quite well, and so the results were not surprising. Furthermore, it supports my idea that using AN, that is adding humor and using modern means of technology and pop culture to break-up lecture and connect topics and ideas to the real world with images etc. appeals to students and likely enhances their learning process.

Following this idea, the second most interesting results from the students’ answers came from the questions about learning. I asked a series of three questions which focused on

how individuals feel about their learning. When asked in a true/false format whether the students felt they learn best when they are having fun, 26 of the 27 students answered “true” to this question; only one answered “false” as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

When asked whether any boring subject could be made interesting if a teacher presented it in a fun way, 24 of the students answered “true”, and three answered “false”. And when asked whether any difficult subject could be made easy if it was presented in a fun way, again 24 of the students answered “true”, and three answered “false”. These answers are significant because it suggests that teachers really do hold the key to learning, from the perspective of students. Implementing some fun, for more than most students in this survey, or bringing some element of joy and entertainment into a lesson seems to help their learning, and it helps student attitude and opinions about their own learning. The answers to these three questions from this small class of students reflects what we should already know as educators.



**Figure 2.** Pie chart illustrating the percentage of students who feel they learn best when enjoying themselves.

One of the things that I was interested in learning about through this survey was what sort of teaching style and general personality most students seem to find most appealing and helpful attributes found in teachers and in their teacher’s classroom management. So I asked a series of three questions to see what most students would suggest.

The first question was whether students usually prefer “teachers who are a bit quirky and/or unique” or whether they prefer “teachers who are quote-unquote ‘normal.’” I didn’t specify what “quirky” or “normal” meant in this context, as I wanted to leave this up to interpretation as it goes without saying that what is normal for one person might

be unusual to another and vice versa; perhaps to some quirky means the way someone looks or dresses and to others it about the way someone behaves and/or the things he or she talks about, or then some combination of these things. With this in mind, 25 of the 27 students answered that they prefer “quirky/unique” teachers; two answered that they prefer “normal” teachers. The second question was whether students usually preferred “a serious and studious classroom environment” or “a more laid back and sometimes humorous classroom environment.” 25 of the students answered that they prefer “a more laid back and sometimes humorous classroom” and two answered that they prefer “a serious and studious classroom” environment.

What was further interesting about these two questions is that there seemed to be an expected pattern to the students answers, as most students who selected they preferred “quirky” teachers, also selected they preferred “laid back” classroom environments. The same went for the other combination of answers, those that selected a preference for “normal” teachers answered they preferred “serious” classroom environments. Nineteen of the 27 students selected the “quirky/laid back” combination. There were only two that selected the “normal/serious” combination. However, interestingly and notably, there were 6 students who deviated from this pattern, selecting “quirky” teachers but a “serious” classroom environment. There were no students who selected the “normal/laidback” combination. Perhaps if the sample size had been larger the results would have been different. The results from my sample however, suggest that these current lukio students at Mattlidens seem to prefer teachers who perhaps create a warm and welcoming classroom environment and those teachers who stand out as individuals and have something memorable or endearing about their person and way of interaction with their students.

The third question about teachers and classroom management was whether students preferred to always know what to expect in the classroom or whether they felt unexpected surprises in the classroom were fun. The results to this question were less unanimous, and not necessarily dependent on the students’ preferences for normal vs. quirky teachers or serious vs. laid back classroom environments. However, 18 of the 27 students said they prefer to have surprises in the classroom because they can be fun, and nine of the students said they prefer to always know what to expect in the classroom. It

was interesting to find that 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the students in the study answered that they enjoyed surprises in the classroom and weren't disturbed by the idea that they don't always know what to expect in class. Again, perhaps if the sample size were larger some pattern would have been noticeable in connection to the answers from the first two questions, or perhaps the popular answer would have deviated if there had been older generations of students involved in the survey process. This would have been interesting to investigate.

I was also curious to see if there were any noticeable correlations between student interest in AN teaching technique, their response to the video, and the type of teacher/teaching style they preferred. However when analyzing the results it proved difficult to draw any clear conclusions on this matter without making assumptions. Because every student responded positively to AN theory being used in the classroom, it was difficult to know whether their responses to the video had anything to do with their openness to fun in the classroom; a few students didn't respond well to the Rube Goldberg video. I realized that this video would be off-putting to some people who are not so interested in silliness. However with the video responses aside, there seemed to be a correlation between openness to AN theory techniques used in the classroom and preference for teachers and classroom management; the majority of students in this study seemed open to fun and humor in the classroom and to a laidback, quirky, and spontaneous teacher/classroom.

Other notable results from the survey came from the following question: "If I suggested to you that you can possibly learn more from this two minute video than you can from a 75 min lecture, what would be your response?" The results were split almost down the middle for this question. Based on their answers, 13 of the 27 students appeared to feel this was likely not possible, as 12 of them answered "I highly doubt it," and 1 answered "not true". However notably, 11 of the 27 students appeared to be open to the idea that something short and meaningful like a video, that is perhaps pivotal, interesting, mind blowing, creative, or somehow "on point" can be more effective, helpful, or memorable to their learning process than say a long lecture on the same topic. Of these 11 students, one answered "absolutely" to this question, and ten answered "possibly true". There were three students who didn't seem to have a solid opinion about the question, as they answered "neutral". I found it interesting when observing the results that depending on

how you view their neutrality on the matter, these three students' "neutral" answers could be looked at as "possibly" because they were open enough to the idea not to select "I highly doubt it"; so I'm suggesting that because they didn't select "I highly doubt it" what they meant by "neutral" was actually "perhaps". In which case, 13 of the students said "no" they didn't think they could learn more from a short two min video than from a long lecture, and 14 were actually rather open to the possibility.

I was also hoping to gain some insight into whether the students' thoughts about their own abilities with creative thought, innovation and ability to handle abstract concepts and tasks had any bearing on their interest in doing these kinds of creative exercises in the classroom and whether this would have any bearing on their interest in AN teaching style. So I developed a series of questions to investigate this idea, asking if the students enjoyed thinking creatively, being innovative and creating things, and/or tackling abstract ideas. Furthermore, I wanted to know whether they found these tasks "mostly easy" or "quite difficult" and whether their own ideas about their abilities with these tasks had any bearing on their interest in doing them. I found however that their answers made it difficult to draw any significant conclusions. Eight of the 27 students answered that they found the same tasks interesting and easy, or then conversely these same eight found tasks not interesting and therefore difficult; this suggested that they are interested in doing things that they feel they are good at doing and come naturally to them and they shy away from tasks they know are difficult for them and that they feel they are not skillful at performing. The remaining 19 students however answered with a mix of answers; some followed the expected pattern of enjoyment and ease while they also answered they enjoyed tasks that they found difficult to perform. It was not surprising to find that no one answered that they didn't enjoy tasks that they found came easily to them; their answers then suggested that all creative, innovative or abstract tasks that were found easy for the individual students were then also enjoyed by all 27 students.

In learning about the students' feeling about their own abilities and interests with creative thinking and exercises, I was curious to see if there would be any visible or obvious correlations to their reactions to "The Page Turner" video and whether it affected their interests in AN teaching methods being used in the classroom. However in



practice, it was difficult to draw any conclusions in the survey results without making assumptions. This was due in part to the fact that most of the students responded favorably to the video and to AN techniques and because most of the students answered that they enjoyed creative and abstract thinking and tasks. Therefore there was no group to compare in contrast. So this line of questioning didn't yield any meaningful data.

#### 9.1.2 Teacher Results and Discussion for AN Survey Part I

There were 29 teachers who partook in Survey Part I. Twenty of these teachers identified as female, nine identified as male. The teacher respondents involved in this part of the survey represented a multi- generational sample; the eldest respondent was born between the years 1940-1950 and the youngest three respondents were born between 1990 -2000. Twelve of the 29 teachers had been teaching for more than ten years. Fifteen had been teaching for less than ten years. The remaining two respondents were new teachers and had less than one year of teaching experience. It would have been beneficial to have had a more even gender representation of teachers in the study, but I was not able to find the same number of male teachers and female teachers who were willing to fill out the survey process. I asked the age and experience of the teachers as well as the subject(s) they taught mostly out of curiosity, but I was also wondering if I would see any notable differences in opinions and answers based on these factors. I was not able to make any assumptions based on these factors, and this was not a surprise as my survey sample size was very small and limited.

As with the student survey, I asked the same questions for the teachers about their own school education with the following question; "In your experiences as a student, have you enjoyed when your teachers have shown similar "nonsense" videos or have otherwise implemented some form of silliness/fun into a classroom lesson that has had relevance to the topic?" Seventeen of the 29 teachers answered that "yes" they enjoyed when their teachers used AN teaching techniques in their classroom. Four of the 29 answered that they "sometimes" enjoyed when their teachers used AN. Five of the 29 respondents said that they felt that they had never experienced AN teaching techniques during their education. Three respondents answered that "no" they didn't enjoy AN during their education. These results are illustrated in Figure 3. However, it is important to note that one of these three teacher respondents who answered "no" to this question

seemed to be focused on the use of “videos” specifically and appeared to overlook the other aspects of AN teaching techniques; I came to this conclusion due to the detailed answer given in his short answer response. His response was, “My opinions can almost always be predicted by knowing my tedious tendency of avoiding the popular response. Fun videos are very popular right now, therefore I tend to react negatively, at least to a certain extent.” Not only was he focused on videos specifically, he also seemed to answer the question with his own teaching in mind and didn’t answer with reflection upon his own learning and educational experiences. This teacher otherwise responded favorably to “The Page Turner” video. So his answer was a bit misleading and confusing and I found his survey to be difficult to analyze.



**Figure 3.** Pie chart which illustrates the percentage of teachers who have enjoyed when their teachers have used meaningful humor and nonsense videos in the classroom.

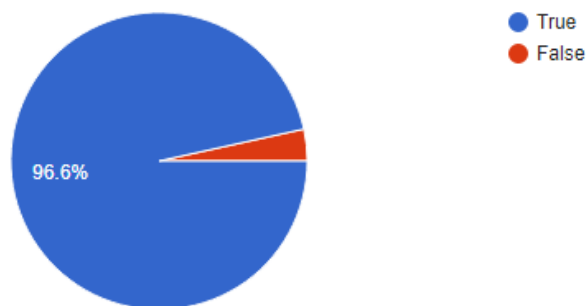
Other notable results from the teacher answers were to the question about their reaction to “The Page Turner” video. Twenty-two of the 29 teachers responded positively towards the video, either selecting “very positive” or “somewhat positive” as their answers. Five teachers responded “neutral” to their feelings about the video. One respondent answered “somewhat negative” about their feelings, and one respondent left the answer blank/didn’t answer the question.

Furthermore, I asked the teachers to explain in more detail how they felt about the video and gave them the following options to select from (they were asked to select all the relevant feelings): “educational,” “creative,” “humorous,” “fun,” “pointless,” and “a waste of your time”. The overall response to the video suggested that most teachers felt

that it was some combination of fun, creative, humorous, and/or educational. Only four teachers answered that they felt the video was “pointless.” There were only five respondents who thought the video was “a waste of their time.” I was very surprised to find that three of the four teachers who reacted positively to “The Page Turner” video selected that they felt the video was “pointless” among the mix of their feelings about the video. Moreover, two of the teachers whose response to “The Page Turner” video was “positive” selected “a waste of your time” among other feelings about the video; one selected all of the options including “a waste of their time,” and the other selected they felt the video was “fun,” “creative,” “humorous,” and “a waste of their time.” I was not expecting any of the respondents who responded favorably to the video to then feel it was “pointless” or “a waste of time.” It was surprising because in my opinion the answers were a bit contradictory, because it doesn’t make sense that something that someone feels is educational, creative, fun, and humorous could also be thought of as also pointless or a waste of time.

I was pleased to find that four of the five teachers who said they felt they had never experienced AN at any level during their own educational experience responded favorably to “The Page Turner” video; one teacher answered “very positive” and three answered “somewhat positive.” Only one of the five teachers responded “somewhat negative” about her initial reaction to the video. Additionally, all five of these teachers listed only positive feelings about the video, suggesting some combination of the following answers; “fun,” “creative,” “educational” and/or “humorous”, including the one who responded otherwise “somewhat negative” about their initial response to the video. Furthermore, these five teachers all said that they enjoy creative endeavors, creative thinking, and tackling abstract problem solving. I had some notion that I would find individuals who were less open and interested in AN and or silliness in the classroom if they had less experience with these types of teaching methods during their education, but these five individuals answers in the survey suggest otherwise. This was surprising, but also positive to hear. And it suggests that perhaps sometime during their career or teacher training they have learnt to use or appreciate the use of humor in the classroom.

As with the student survey, other notable results from the teachers' answers came by way of the three questions focused on how they feel about their own learning during the time they were students. When asked in a true/false format whether the teachers felt they learnt best when they were having fun, 28 of the 29 teachers answered "true" to this question as illustrated in Figure 4 below; only one answered "false". When asked whether any boring subject could be made interesting if a teacher presented it in a fun way, again 28 of the 29 teachers answered "true", one answered "false". And when asked whether any difficult subject could be made easy if it was presented in a fun way, all of the 29 teachers answered "true". Much like the students' responses to these questions, the teachers' answers reflect a similar idea that the teacher can greatly impact learning and student attitude about their own learning with skillful and thoughtful presentation of subjects and information. The general feeling from both the students' and teachers' responses to these questions suggests that they feel enjoying oneself and having joy in the classroom facilitates their learning and attitudes towards learning.



**Figure 4.** Pie chart illustrating the percentage of teachers who feel they learn best when enjoying themselves.

As with the student part of the survey, I also wanted to know about the teachers' reflections on their preference for teaching styles and personality during their learning as students. So I asked the teachers the same series of three questions.

The first question again was whether the teachers preferred "teachers who are a bit quirky and/or unique" or whether they preferred "teachers who are quote-unquote 'normal'". Twenty-four of the 29 answered that they preferred "quirky/unique" teachers; five answered that they preferred "normal" teachers. The second question again was whether the teachers usually preferred "a serious and studious classroom

environment” or “a more laid back and sometimes humorous classroom environment.” Twenty-five of the teachers answered that they preferred “a more laid back and sometimes humorous classroom” and four answered that they preferred “a serious and studious classroom” environment.

As with the student answers the pattern of “quirky” paired with “laid back” and “normal” paired with “serious” was again present in the teachers’ answers; there were only five teacher answers who deviated from this pairing. Two of these teachers chose the “quirky/serious” combination and three of the teachers chose the “normal/laid back” combination; this pairing of “normal/laid back” was not present in the students’ survey answers.

Again as with the student results, the teachers results suggest that the majority seemed to prefer teachers who perhaps created a warm and welcoming classroom environment and those teachers who stood out as individuals or who had something memorable or endearing about their person.

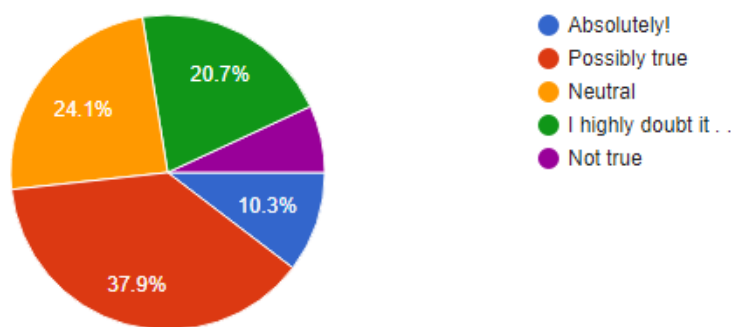
The third question about teachers and classroom management asked of the teachers was whether they preferred to “always know what to expect in the classroom” or whether they felt “unexpected surprises in the classroom were fun”. The results to this question were split down the middle with a small preference towards “unexpected surprises”. Sixteen of the 29 teachers said that as students they enjoyed “unexpected surprises in the classroom”. Thirteen of the teachers selected that they preferred to “always know what to expect”. It was interesting again to find that more than half of the teachers answered that they enjoyed surprises in the classroom when they were students. One could argue that this suggests that many people would be open to the use of AN teaching techniques that seem spontaneous and seize the moment to advance or enhance student learning.

To build on this idea, I was curious to find whether teachers felt their own personal preferences for learning, effective teaching styles, and teacher personalities affect and reflect their own teaching styles now that they are teachers. The idea behind asking these questions was a way to see if I could find any evidence or suggestion that teachers’ personal teaching styles have been learnt and influenced by their own experiences in education. The obvious answer is yes, either in a positive or negative

way; it is a natural tendency as an educator to either strive to be like those teachers who positively influenced our learning, or then we strive to be the opposite of those individuals who made school laborious, difficult, or boring. However, I felt it would be important to ask these questions of the teacher respondents to have some empirical data on the matter. As to be expected, the results suggest that 27 of the 29 teachers feel their answers to the questions about their personal preferences for teachers, teaching style and how they personally learn have affected their teaching style to some degree. Five of the 29 answered “absolutely!” that their experience during their own education influenced the way they teach. Fifteen of the 29 answered “most of the time” these factors play a part in their teaching style and methods. Six of the 29 answered “sometimes”, and one of the 29 answered “perhaps”. There were only two of the 29 teachers who felt their answers to these questions had little bearing on their teaching style and behavior in the classroom as they answered “probably not”. However, I realize this question is left to interpretation and it also depends on what angle the teacher is thinking about the questions in terms of teaching and influencing their students. It should be noted that I am aware that teachers are aware that the way they learn and the things that interest them as a person won’t appeal or help all students, so it is possible that those teachers who suggested they don’t teach or behave the way they prefer to learn might be a reflection more on this awareness that all students are individuals and therefore a teacher needs to take into account everyone’s learning needs and not only cater to those students who think and learn like they do. Of these two teachers who answered “probably not” one was a new teacher who had been teaching for less than a year, and the other was a teacher who had been teaching for less than 10 years. With this in mind, it shows that both inexperienced and experienced teachers can approach and reflect upon their own teaching in this way.

As with the student sample, other notable results from the survey came from the following question: “If I suggested to you that you can possibly learn more from this two minute video than you can from a 75 min lecture, what would be your response?” The results were again split down the middle for this question. Based on their answers, 14 of the 29 teachers appeared to feel this was likely possible, as three of them answered “absolutely!” and 11 answered “possibly true”; this is roughly half of the teachers.

These results are illustrated in Figure 5. This is rather telling to me. That nearly half of the adults involved in the study either felt or were open to the possibility that something short and meaningful like a video clip can be as impactful as or even more meaningful to their learning than a lengthy lecture full of detail speaks volumes about what is meaningful for learning. Additionally, seven of the 29 teachers answered “neutral” to the possibility. As with the student answers, depending on how one interprets the teachers’ neutrality on the matter their indecision could be interpreted as “possibly”. In which case  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the teachers then appear open to the idea that something short, pivotal, and well selected like a video could be more poignant and beneficial to learning than a long lecture, say if the lecture were rather long and dry. However, eight of the teachers were not open to this idea, as six answered “I highly doubt it” and two answered “not true.” Nevertheless, the teacher answers suggest to me that most teachers involved in the study are open to and embrace well executed AN techniques and feel they are helpful to their own learning process.



**Figure 5.** Pie chart illustrating the teachers’ thoughts about whether it would be possible that they could learn more from a 2 min video than from a 75 min lecture.

## 9.2 Analysis and Results for AN Survey Part II

Google forms graphed my survey results in pie charts. There were 49 respondents who completed “Survey Part II” of which 33 were female, and 16 male. Of these individuals, 28 were students, and 21 were teachers. Any detailed information about the results and charts not shown directly in this thesis can be found within the results of the online survey using the link provided in Appendix 1.2 of this paper.

### 9.2.1 Student Results and Discussion for AN Survey Part II

Of the 28 students involved in my study, 24 students (86%) were current students born between 2000- 2010. The remaining four students were already out of school and were born between 1970- 1990. Of these students, 17 identified as female and 11 identified as male.

When asked whether they felt they understood the PowerPoint presentation and had a good understanding about the AN teaching philosophy, 25 of these students (89.3%) answered that they mostly understood the method, selecting either that they “agree” they understood, or then the other common answer was “I think so,” suggesting they were quite sure they understood the teaching method.

There were only three students who felt they weren’t sure if they grasped the idea or understood the AN teaching method and this was reflected in their survey answers as well. Their answers were rather vague and uncertain regarding AN. They selected options such as “I don’t think I understand this teaching method,” “possibly”, and “maybe” when asked about their understanding and whether or not they had experienced AN in the classroom during their education. Furthermore, because they were not certain they understood AN when asked if they felt it would help them learn they suggested also things such as “neutral” and “possibly.”

It should be noted that although these three respondents were unsure of their understanding of AN teaching philosophy, two of these three suggested that they would be open to AN being used by a teacher in some future classes. So over all it can be assumed that these two did not find the teaching method to be personally off-putting. Furthermore, they both suggested that it was “possible” that it might help their learning process. For the most part, they seemed fairly neutral to the teaching method.

The third confused respondent’s survey answers were additionally rather confusing to interpret, because she filled out the survey from a student’s perspective however in her detailed open answered response she answered from a teacher’s perspective, stating that she felt that this teaching method was one that did not mesh well with her personality and that she didn’t feel that she would be able to use this method as a teacher in her classroom because she felt she would not be able to execute the teaching method well.

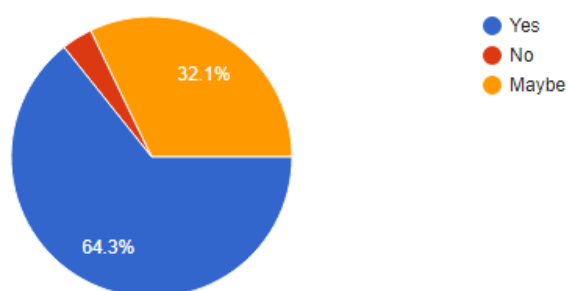


This led to a difficult interpretation of her answers and then I was left with the question of whether she was a teacher who accidentally filled the survey from a student's perspective. However, I chose to keep her responses in my results section as a student because her answers were the only negative results in the entire survey process; that is, she was the only person who said they disliked the teaching method as a whole and that it did not mesh with their personal interests. As well, because she filled the survey from a student's perspective but then suggested in her open answers that she was also a teacher, her answers reflected that she was not interested in the method being used by teachers, and that she would not like to use the method as part of her teaching process either. It was surprising that she suggested that she felt "neutral" to whether the process would help her learning process. However, I think it is important to note that she admitted to feeling very confused by the whole survey process. Furthermore, it is perhaps relevant to note that she was not a current student as she listed her birthdate between the years 1980-1990. Additionally, she was the only student to answer that she had never been exposed to AN during her education process. It would make sense as well that her lack of experience with the teaching method might have added to her confusion about the teaching method as a whole, and this follows my hypothesis quite well.

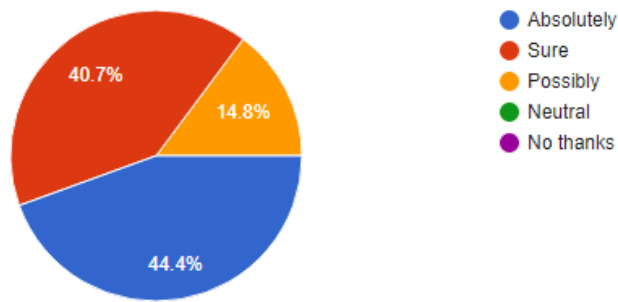
There was one other male student respondent whose answers to the survey were difficult to interpret. Of the 28 students, he was the only student who suggested specifically that he felt some negativity to the AN teaching philosophy; his answer to the question of how he felt about AN was "somewhat negative." However, his follow up answers throughout the survey led me to believe he was either confused by the teaching method and/or then was not answering the questions with honesty and/or serious effort. I assume this because his answers did not follow a linear logic. He suggested that he was certain that AN had been used as part of his education by one junior high teacher, and that this method had been used with great frequency, in "most classes" taught by this teacher. So with this in mind while interpreting his answers, he suggested that he had some specific teaching method in mind when he was thinking of AN as part of his education. Although he felt negatively towards AN and he suggested he didn't believe it would help his learning process he then went on to suggest that "possibly" he would still be

open to his teachers using the method further in his studies. So somehow even though he suggests negativity and lack of learning via AN he wouldn't mind if his teachers use the method; I would have expected someone with this type of answer to suggest they would not be interested in the method being used further in their education. Moreover, his open answer to further explain his feelings about AN suggested to me that he did not really understand the method in full, or rather his interpretation of the method led me to believe he was lacking some understanding as he said "When learning I learn the best when it is very engaging for example discussion and workshops where there is a lot of interaction between students and teachers. So applied nonsense feels like there is a lack of communication." His interpretation that AN lacks communication is not really relevant to AN, because the teaching method is very communicative and social, in my opinion. He seems to not be aware that he did not understand the PowerPoint presentation or then he is not admitting a lack of understanding.

Some significant findings suggest that of the 28 students, 27 of these students said that they were familiar with AN and that some or many of their teachers between primary school and high school used AN teaching method in some form. These results can be seen in Figure 6 below. Moreover, these 27 students said they would be open to the method being used in more of their classes as illustrated in Figure 7. Additionally, all of them said that their feelings were either "neutral" to the method possibly helping them learn or that "yes" the method would likely help them learn.

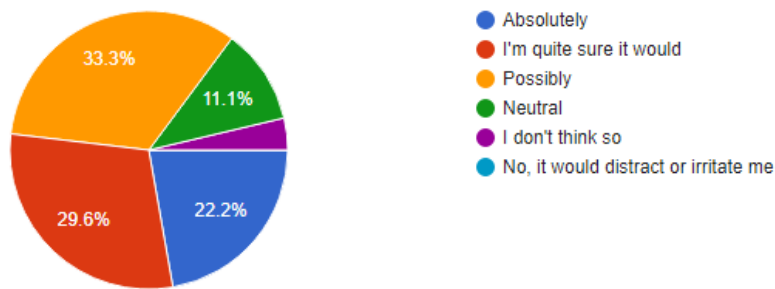


**Figure 6.** Pie chart illustrating the percentage of students who have experienced AN during their education.



**Figure 7.** Pie chart of the percentage of students who are open to AN being used in the classroom.

Nine of these 27 students responded “very positively” to AN as a teaching method; these nine students also said that many of their teachers used AN at various stages of their education. In addition, twelve of the 27 students answered “somewhat positive” towards AN teaching method; they too also felt that some or many of their teachers had used this method during their education process. These findings from my survey followed my hypothesis that a person’s exposure to AN method during their education would result in a more positive attitude towards the teaching method. So 21 of the 28 students responded positively to AN. Four of the student respondents chose “neutral” to express their feelings about AN. Two individuals were unable to give an opinion about the teaching method because they did not understand what AN was all about. And then there was the one male student who suggested he felt “somewhat negative” towards AN. Twenty-seven of the 28 students felt either neutral or positive about AN helping to facilitate their learning process in the classroom as illustrated in Figure 8. These 27 students answered one of three responses: “Absolutely”, “I’m quite sure it would help my learning”, and “Possibly.” There was only the one male student who answered “I don’t think so” in response to this question about AN helping his learning process.



**Figure 8.** Pie chart illustrating the percentage of students who feel AN teaching method is helpful for their learning process.

### 9.2.2 Teacher Results and Discussion for AN Survey Part II

There were 21 teachers who partook in AN Survey Part II. Of these teachers, 16 identified as female and five identified as male. All of the teachers in the study were currently living/teaching in either Finland or the US. Eighteen of the 21 teachers were born between 1970 -1990; of the remaining three teachers, two were born between 1940-1960, and one was born between 1990- 2000. There was an interesting and eclectic mix of subject teachers and primary school teachers who filled out the survey, and there was also an interesting mix of seasoned teachers who had been teaching for ten years or more and then some newer teachers who had been teaching for only a year.

I tried to have the same teachers fill out both parts of the survey, however I was not able to get all of the teachers who partook in the first part of the survey to take part in the second survey, unfortunately there were several teacher respondents from Finland missing from the second survey. However, those respondents from the US who partook in the survey completed both parts of the survey; although the survey results are anonymous I was given email confirmation of those respondents from abroad when they completed both survey.

The results from the survey suggested that all 21 teachers felt they understood the PowerPoint presentation about AN teaching method, as everyone either selected “agree” or “I think so”. Of the 21 teachers, 11 suggested that they had for certain experienced AN during some level of their education. Of these 11 teachers who had learnt through AN, six of them responded “very positively” to AN teaching technique and four selected

“somewhat positively.” There was only one female respondent born between 1950-1960 who said that she had experienced AN throughout all levels of her education by a few teachers who used the method often who suggested she felt rather “neutral” to the teaching method. However when analyzing the rest of her survey answers, it showed that she felt the method likely helped her learn and that she felt it likely helped her students learn, and so she implemented the method often in her classroom. This would suggest then despite her neutrality, she felt the teaching method is effective and useful; her feelings seemed to be more positive rather than neutral, but perhaps she was not sure what the question was specifically asking when she selected “neutral.”

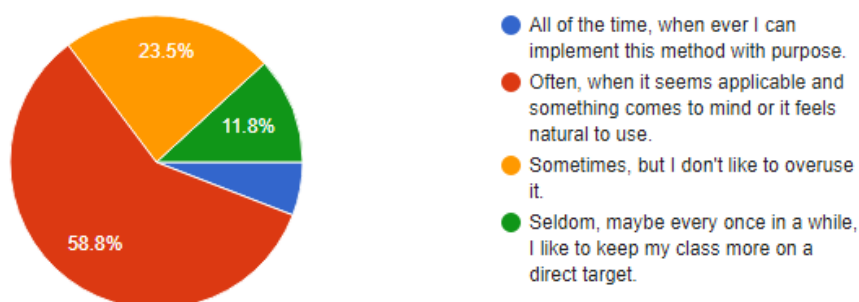
In addition, there were three teachers who suggested that perhaps they had experienced AN during their education, but they seemed hesitant to say so for certain, perhaps because they didn’t want to assume they understood the theory without any doubt or perhaps because they weren’t sure they could rely on their memories. However, if these three respondents results are added to those that were certain they experienced AN during their education, then 14 of the 21 students felt they had experienced the teaching method during their education. There were seven teachers who said for sure they didn’t remember or feel that AN was used during their education. I was pleased to find that most of the teachers felt they had been exposed to AN teaching method.

Of these seven teachers who had never learnt through AN, I was pleasantly surprised to find that four responded with the answer “very positive” about their feeling towards AN, two responded “somewhat positive”, and one responded with the answer “neutral”.

There was not a single teacher who felt negatively about the teaching method. And of these seven teachers who did not learn through AN, four of them said that they do in fact use AN techniques in their own teaching. It would have been interesting to have asked these four individuals if they learnt this teaching method as part of their teacher training or then from working with other teachers who use this technique, or then was it something they had learnt to do from experience, or then thought to do on their own. In retrospect, it would have been helpful to have had a question in the survey for these individuals to explain how they learnt to apply AN techniques in their teaching. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that all four were female teachers, however the female

respondents greatly outnumbered male respondents in this survey, so it is not statistically valuable information.

Of the 21 teachers, 18 of them said that they use AN as part of their teacher tool kit. Twelve of these 18 teachers said they implement the method “often”, four said they use it “sometimes”, and two said they use it “Every once in a while” as illustrated in Figure 9.



**Figure 9.** Pie chart illustrating the frequency with which the teachers said they use AN teaching techniques in their classrooms

The remaining three teachers said they had never tried using AN in their teaching. Interestingly, all three of these teachers said they had never experienced AN during their education. I did not find this to be surprising because my feelings are that this type of teaching method is one that is often learnt; if one does not experience this kind of playful abstract thinking during one’s own education, it is less likely that one will learn or know how to use this technique on their own.

Two of these teachers who lacked AN in their own education and who didn’t feel that they themselves use AN, responded that they felt “very positive” or “somewhat positive” about AN. Furthermore, these same two teachers said they would be open to trying to use the method in the future. They were also both open to the idea that it might help their learning and the learning of students in their care.

There was only one Chemistry teacher who did not learn through AN who said that it would feel “unnatural” for him to implement the AN teaching method. He also suggested that he felt this method doesn’t/wouldn’t help him learn. However, when

asked if he felt it would help some students learn he said he felt “neutral” to the possibility, and when asked if he would attend some classes which implemented AN method he said “possibly.”

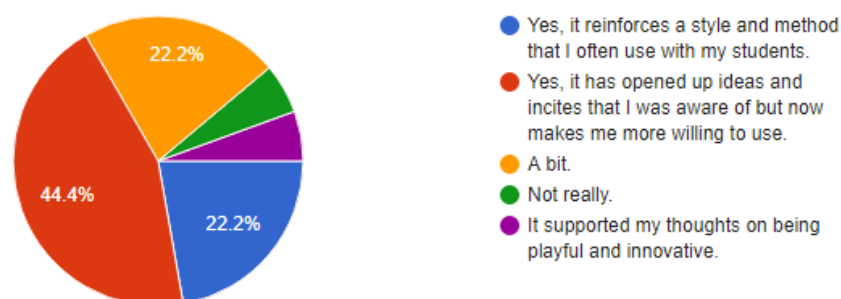
Furthermore, his short answer responses were a bit confusing as he stated, “I don’t think that I come from an area of expertise that this teaching method is relevant to. Science in a way has always been making sense of non-sense or something you don’t understand. The laboratories and questions are the non-sense.” His more detailed explanation about why he felt AN would not help his own learning was, “I enjoy structure and logical thinking exercises.” In my opinion, there is no reason that logical thinking and structured lessons must be separated from AN teaching method. This teachers answers led me to believe that he missed the core idea behind AN teaching method or rather that he didn’t realize it is possible to implement humor and fun into a structured, logical lesson. AN is in my opinion something very useful and meaningful in teaching the sciences.

I would like to note that there were other Chemistry, Maths, and Science teachers who partook in the survey process who felt differently from this Chemistry teacher about implementing AN in the Sciences. One Maths and Science teacher from my study said, “I had a professor in college teach us math from a historical point of view (grad level non-Euclidean geometry--but it was awesome). He understood the rigor but also the magic of the topic.” Furthermore, this same teacher suggested that, “When I teach statistics, we spend time talking about absurd results from observations studies to distinguish correlation and causation. Part of teaching is helping students see the world differently or in unexpected ways.” Another Maths teacher, stated with regards to AN, “This method helped to start real deep thinking and allowed constructive problem solving.” Also one of the student respondents from Mattlidens said that his Biology teacher implements AN method often stating, “An example is our Bio teacher. He uses a lot of humor during his classes.”

Perhaps it is worth noting that this Chemistry teacher who felt uncomfortable with AN methods was a new teacher, and had been teaching for less than a year. Whereas the other two Science and Maths teachers were rather seasoned professionals who had been

teaching for 10-20 years or more. It would be plausible that using this technique is something that one might learn to implement through experience with interacting with students and gaining insight and wisdom through working alongside other successful and professional colleagues.

I ended this second survey with a question about whether the teachers felt the survey process influenced their ideas about teaching, and more specifically whether it either reinforced their own knowledge about teaching or then opened up ideas about using AN in their own teaching. I was really pleased to find that of the 21 teachers, 14 teachers said the survey process introduced them to new ideas and incites about the benefits of using AN teaching methods. And five of the 21 said that the survey process positively reinforced and supported their own ideas about using AN in the classroom. These results can be seen in Figure 10 below. There was the one teacher however, who was not interested in using AN and he was not influenced by the survey process or persuaded in any way to try using it either.



**Figure 10.** Pie chart which illustrates the percentage of teachers who felt the survey process introduced them to novel ideas or reinforced previous knowledge.

There was only one teacher who answered this question in an unexpected, confusing manner; in her survey answers, she suggested that she had learnt through AN during her education, that she used AN often in her own teaching, and as well that she felt it was helpful for her own learning and emphatically chose “Absolutely!” for the answer to whether the teaching method would help some students learn. Despite these positive feelings about AN, when asked about how she felt about AN as a teaching method she



answered “neutral” and when asked about whether the survey introduced her to ideas or reinforced her own ideas she answered “not really.” I wasn’t certain what to make of her answers. Based on her other survey answers, I would have expected that she would have selected that she felt positively towards AN and that she would have said the survey process reinforced a method that she already implemented. I wondered if she had reservations or issues with the term “Applied Nonsense” being used to describe this style of teaching. She was also a retired and seasoned English and Maths teacher who had taught for more than 20 years and from a closer look at her open ended question answers I was not able to gain any insight to her rather vague or rather neutral answers with regard to the teaching method, as her open answers were rather supportive and positive about AN. In one answer she even stated, “I agree that ‘play’ is a powerful learning tool.” Furthermore she chose not to add any additional comments to explain her neutrality towards the method in the additional comments section. Nevertheless, I interpreted her survey as positive support for AN teaching method since she used it “often”, and felt that it is an effective method to help reinforce student learning.

I was expecting to find that those teachers who had a lot of exposure to AN during their education would feel the most positively towards AN. I also expected to find that these same teachers also used it with the most frequency within their own teachings. My results did suggest this, however they also showed that even those teachers who felt they did not learn through AN responded rather favorably to AN philosophy. And that more than half of these teachers who had not learnt through AN still managed to learn and implement the teaching method during their teaching career. I found this to be a rather remarkable and positive finding. There was an overwhelming support and positive attitude among almost every teacher involved in this survey process for the use and effectiveness of Applied Nonsense teaching techniques. And despite my original concerns that the lack of exposure to AN during a person’s education would result in teachers and students not appreciating or using AN seems somewhat unnecessary as once exposed my findings would suggest that the positive nature of the method allow for most people to understand, benefit, apply, and/or share the method.

## **10. Validity and Reliability of the Research: Issues with my Method and Possible Changes for Future Research**

One thing that I would modify about my method is that I did not think ahead of time to compare and contrast the questionnaire results between the students and teachers from Finland and the United States. Therefore, I did not provide a question in either of the survey to determine where the students and teachers were currently living or where they were originally from. This is unfortunate, as it would have been interesting to have seen if there would be a significant difference in attitudes and opinions about “The Page Turner” video and the “Applied Nonsense” teaching method between the two countries.

Moreover, I also would have liked to have had a larger sample of US students partake in the survey process. It would have been interesting to have had an equal number of current US students of similar 15-18 age range as those students from Mattlidens represented in the study. It would have also been beneficial to have had the same number of male and female students represented in the study, to better gauge if there would be a gender difference in response to AN. All in all, it would have been beneficial and more telling if I had a larger sample size for the survey process, as the results would have been more statistically significant. However, the timing of my research was rather unfortunate as it coincided with the end of the spring term and ran into summer holiday for both countries, so I was unable to arrange having current US students fill out my survey, and I was not able to have my survey process presented to any additional students here in Finland.

I would have also liked to have collected an equal number of students both in the US and Finland who were presently not students, but studied between 1950-2000 to have some idea about the generational difference in attitudes towards AN theory. It would have been interesting to see if there was some geographical differences to the application and attitudes to AN as well as whether it is something that has been noticeably present within the educational systems worldwide for many decades. I realize, however, that this kind of data is based on interpretation and memory and

therefore the reliability of this kind of data is questionable. Nonetheless, it would have been interesting to see if there appeared to be differences.

Furthermore, it is important to note that as the Finnish students who partook in my study were not from the national side of the Finnish education system, they are perhaps arguably not the best representatives of the average Finnish student's attitude towards AN. For comparison, it would have been interesting to have had the opportunity to have also done the survey process with a group of Finnish students who were enrolled in the national side of the education system.

Additionally, it should be noted that the teachers from Finland involved in my study were from University of Helsinki's STEP program, so they too were not the best representation of the attitudes and opinions of Finnish teachers, as many of the STEP student teachers involved in my study were not Finnish citizens; they were an international group of student teachers. So it would have been beneficial to have had Finnish teachers from Finland represented in my study to get a better idea about the cultural implications surrounding attitudes towards this teaching method. Similarly, it would have been interesting to have had an equal number of male and female teachers represented in my study to see if there would be a gender difference in response to AN teaching theory. It also would have been beneficial to have had a statistically significant sample size of teacher respondents.

However, all was not lost because I did not differentiate between the country of origin for participants, or the country in which the teachers and students are currently living, or focus on comparing gender biases. My survey results can be analyzed in a more general international attitude towards AN teaching method as the participants are from various global communities.

In retrospect, with regard to the survey process, I should have perhaps added some explanation of Applied Nonsense teaching theory as part of "Survey Part I". Perhaps the attitude to the video would have been more sincere and on-point if they had some awareness of the method ahead of time as I touched on in my results section. As it was, several of the students and teachers seemed to miss the main idea behind the process; many of the answers gave me some indication that they interpreted the questions as

asking specifically whether they would like to watch videos in class, rather than interpreting the questions as asking whether they are open to fun and entertaining material as part of their learning process. Moreover, many respondents including several seasoned and skillful teachers (who I know for certain use what I would consider as part of the realm of AN, as I have observed their lessons and have been witness to the process) missed the main idea behind some of the questions in this first part of the survey; while analyzing the survey answers they appear to have missed the main idea behind the word “applied” in connection to the word “nonsense” and interpreted the questions as asking whether they are willing to use random, unnecessary, not well planned or relevant silly material during lessons to amuse students. Perhaps the survey questions and process could have been better explained or planned to avoid this error in interpretation, or at least to minimize this messy interpretation which gets in the way of accurate representation of their feelings about the method in Survey Part I.

In addition, as these two survey were my first experience designing survey questions and multiple choice answers, I tried to give the respondents options that felt genuine and non-limiting. For example, in the question about whether the students and teachers felt AN would help their learning process, I gave the following possible answer choices: “Absolutely,” “I’m quite sure it would,” “Possibly,” “Neutral,” “I don’t think so,” and finally, “No, it would distract me or irritate me”. Although I stick by my decision to provide respondents with these answer options, I realized while trying to interpret the results that the subtle differences between e.g. “I’m quite sure it would” and “Possibly” were not so critical as I was just trying to make sure that the respondents did not forcefully oppose to the method or feel very negatively towards the teaching method. In retrospect, perhaps giving the respondents less options would have been easier to manage for the results section, but it may have also forced some respondents to answer with more indecision, which is never a good feeling when filling out a survey about your feelings. It could have also presented its own set of issues with regard to genuine responses.

In addition, another possible future amendment to this survey process was suggested by one teacher respondent in the comments section of the survey, which is that I should have added a question in my survey that would have allowed for teachers to give one

example of how they have implemented Applied Nonsense in their teachings. This would have been a very valuable and helpful question to have added to the survey because it would have helped to clarify how the teachers interpreted/ understood AN teaching theory, as well it would have given examples of AN teaching techniques in use by many individual teachers which I could have used as examples within my thesis.

Similarly, it would have been interesting to have asked both the students and the teachers to give an example of how AN has been used in their education as it would have helped to clarify their understanding and interpretation of AN and it would have given some additional data about how AN has been used by various teachers at differing levels of their education. However, by the time the question was suggested/introduced it was too late in the survey process to add these additional questions to this second survey.

However with that said, there were a few teacher respondents who gave examples of AN that they both used and had experienced within their own education in their short answer section of this survey, so there were a couple of examples given, which can be seen in the online survey results found in the appendix of this paper.

## **10.1 Issues with the Survey**

As this question about whether or not the students felt AN method would be helpful for their learning was an important question for my thesis, I had the students answer a more detailed short answer response to explain why they felt AN would or would not help their learning. These detailed responses brought to light some complications with the survey process. Some of the student's answers were rather clear and the answers within a given survey for the series of questions seemed to coincide with one another; it seemed clear that these students understood AN teaching method and what the questions were asking. However, there were a number of students whose answers seemed to contradict one another e.g. a couple of students said they could only recall one time that I teacher had used AN method in the classroom, however they then suggested they experienced AN in both primary school and junior high; this is not possible. If you have only one memory of the method being used in one class it cannot then be something that you experienced in both primary school and junior high. Furthermore, some of their

short answers to further explain why they thought AN was helpful to their learning, suggested that perhaps a few of the students missed the point of what AN theory was all about; their short answers suggested something that didn't have anything to do with AN teaching method; I listed these specific cases in the results for the student survey answers, with the two confusing survey by one male and one female student.

One plausible reason for the confusing or contradicting answers within these individual surveys with mixed answers, is that this survey process was quite demanding of the students for a number of reasons. Firstly, it required that they understood what AN was all about; as this was their first introduction to the concept, it is not surprising that some of the students didn't understand the full meaning of AN. The presentation and survey also required that they understand something about the planning and thought that goes into a class lesson and content that teachers develop to help them learn material; this is a rather mature and complex process that perhaps some of the students had never before been asked to think about. Furthermore, it required that the students have a clear memory of their education as a whole; perhaps some of the lukio students did not remember so far back into their education and so their answers might be more "guessing" than factual as not all people are good at storing long term memories about their childhood. Additionally, for many of the students it might have been the first time that they had ever been asked to think about and reflect upon their own learning process.

Moreover, they were also asked to fill the survey out in class, so they didn't have an unlimited amount of time to ponder the answers. Many appeared to be answering the questions in haste and some were even socializing with neighboring students while answering the survey questions. Moreover, the survey process was given towards the end of their academic school year, summer holiday was only a week or two away, so it cannot be certain how much desire, time and/or effort was put into the survey process/answers.

Something that I touch on in my result findings, is that perhaps for the students I should have taken a moment to explain my wishes for them to take the survey process seriously; to answer individually, and as honestly and thoroughly as possible. I had a limited window of time to present the survey process and so did not have much

opportunity to explain the importance of survey seriousness for an academic study. Furthermore, I assumed because I was dealing with lukio students that I would not need to explain the importance of this academic survey process. But it was rather clear from a few of the survey responses and the visible attitude towards the survey process that it perhaps would have been helpful for some of the respondents. As it was, some of the students were chatting with neighbors while filling out the survey, perhaps even answering the same answers as their neighbor because they didn't know how to answer or they didn't want to be bothered with the survey process. And as I mentioned, some of the students seemed to fill out the survey process in haste.

As to be expected, these same problems did not exist with the teacher responses to the survey process. As educated academics, their answers and responses to the survey process as a whole gave an impression that they understood the significance of the study; they were more willing participants, and they had an obvious advantage in understanding the concepts and questions being asked of them.

## 11. Conclusion and Discussion

Providing students with an opportunity to develop a lifelong love of learning as well as helping them develop innovative creative problem solving skills is something that I feel deeply passionate about as an educator. Learning and understanding help us live a better life, a more fulfilling life. And at present time, the world with which we are handing the children of today is a world fraught with complicated and dire problems to be solved. Education is no longer simply a pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowing or for a means to a job which allows us to collect bits of paper we call money with which to buy unnecessary items with. Food shortages, over population, climate change, waste management, and a pressing need to rethink critical issues like renewable energy, make it clear that education needs to be something so much more.

We need to rethink the education of students to help prepare these new generations with the skills they will need to meet these ever growing serious challenges. We must provide students with the ability to problem solve in innovative creative ways. Thinking outside the box is no longer something that simply puts students ahead of the game or gives them an advantage over their peers. Sadly, it's what might just save the planet, or a species from extinction, or help solve the issue of micro plastics destroying the oceans, soil, and remaining food sources. The education systems the world over need an overhaul change and it is incumbent upon educators to provide students with the skills, hope, drive, desire, and confidence they will need to solve these ever growing and overwhelming future problems. These life skills are certainly not going to come from a fact-cramming, traditional lecture based teaching-studying-learning process in formal educational systems which are meant to prepare students for high stakes exams.

Applied Nonsense is a teaching philosophy that I feel might give educators some hope in helping students achieve these necessary goals. Using humor and fun in the classroom to break-up information and help capture student's interest as well as using the material to link ideas and concepts to information that is meaningful to students has so many positive benefits for helping the teaching-studying-learning process for most individuals. It is a versatile style of teaching that can be adapted or used for any age student and for any teaching subject. Moreover it is a way for educators to provide



students with genuine problem solving situations, and opportunities for creative innovation, as well as linking abstract ideas that help prepare them for real world thinking.

The findings from my survey study overwhelmingly suggest that the educators and students involved in my study feel that humor and fun in the classroom have a positive impact on their personal learning abilities as well as their personal enjoyment in school and learning, and therefore arguably their interest in learning and education.

Furthermore, my survey results showed that a surprising majority of the educators involved in my study are either implementing AN teaching methods or they are open to using them in the future. The findings support my ideas that AN is an effective and helpful method in helping to promote a positive environment for studying and learning. My research and results would suggest that more studies on this topic should be investigated, to see if these ideas about enhancing the teaching-studying-learning process through AN are universal among people everywhere in the world.

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# Appendix

## **Appendix 1: INTERNET LINK TO SURVEY PART I and SURVEY PART II**

Appendix 1.1 Link for AN Survey Part I with detailed graphs and data results

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1QytERp1LKUc6hyBWqp53Kj8ykvSeIbdD4TqGfkz-5Zs/edit?usp=drive\\_open&ths=true](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1QytERp1LKUc6hyBWqp53Kj8ykvSeIbdD4TqGfkz-5Zs/edit?usp=drive_open&ths=true)

Appendix 1.2 Link for Applied Nonsense survey Part II with detailed graphs and data results

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18kEFQ15FrPDR\\_nJcVa-kH5WyoDRbMzmA6PlbWn7cpps/edit?usp=drive\\_open&ths=true](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18kEFQ15FrPDR_nJcVa-kH5WyoDRbMzmA6PlbWn7cpps/edit?usp=drive_open&ths=true)

## Appendix 2: AN Survey Part I Paper Survey

### Appendix 2.1 Student Paper Survey Example

This is an example of a student's paper survey that I logged into the online survey database at a later date. Note: There is a horizontal blue slash across the top of the first page which I drew as a marker to indicate that I had already logged this particular survey online; this slash was not there when the survey was given to the student.

University of Helsinki  
English Philology Dept.  
Applied Nonsense Survey  
M.A. Thesis Research by: Lisa Kontio  
This survey is to be filled out after watching  
"The Page Turner" Rube Goldberg, Joseph's Machines:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOM18dM6N7Q>

HELINGIN YLIOPISTO  
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET  
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

This survey is anonymous, please do not put your name. Please answer all of the following questions. There are multiple choice, True/False, Yes/No, Either/Or, and open-ended questions; for all but the open-ended questions, give only one answer. Thank you for taking part in my research!

1. I am: \*Please select either student or teacher, and then please specify your gender identity

☒ a student and I am: ☐ female ☒ male ☐ other  
☐ a teacher

2. What is your first reaction to this video? Please select the most applicable answer

☐ very positive ☐ somewhat negative  
☒ somewhat positive ☐ very negative  
☐ neutral

3. Do you find the video:

Educational? ☒ Yes | ☐ No  
Creative? ☒ Yes | ☐ No  
Humorous? ☒ Yes | ☐ No  
Fun? ☒ Yes | ☐ No  
Pointless? ☐ Yes | ☒ No  
A waste of your time? ☐ Yes | ☒ No

4. In your experiences as a student, have you enjoyed when your teachers have shown similar "nonsense" videos or implemented some form of silliness/fun into a classroom lesson: ☒ Yes | ☐ No

Please explain your answer further:

It is good at lightening up the mood in class, and a bit of fun can help keep students concentrated.

5. I enjoy:

thinking creatively? ☒ Yes | ☐ No and I find doing this: ☐ Hard | ☒ Easy  
being innovative and/or creating things? ☒ Yes | ☐ No and I find doing this: ☒ Hard | ☐ Easy  
tackling abstract ideas/concepts? ☐ Yes | ☒ No and I find doing this: ☒ Hard | ☐ Easy

Student Paper Survey Example Page 1.

6. In which of the following school subjects do you think this video could be appropriate lesson material for:

Chemistry?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
Philosophy?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
English?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Physics?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
Biology?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
History?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Social Sciences?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Maths?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No

7. If I suggested to you that you can learn more from this 2 minute video than you can from a 75 min lecture, what would be your response:

☐ absolutely | ☐ I highly doubt it ...

☒ possibly true | ☐ not true

☐ neutral

8. What does the term "applied nonsense" mean to you:

It means 'nonsense' which can be used in a positive way to attract attention or another positive manner.

9. My favorite kind of class has lessons surrounding:

<input type="checkbox"/> teacher-centered lecture	<input type="checkbox"/> inventing or creating some project
<input type="checkbox"/> group work	<input type="checkbox"/> presenting or performing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> class discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> other (please explain): _____

10. Select whether you feel the following statements are true or false in your opinion: (either/or)

Any boring subject can be interesting if the teacher presents it in a fun way. ☒ True | ☐ False

Any difficult subject can be made easier if the teacher presents it in a fun way. ☒ True | ☐ False

I learn best when I am enjoying myself. ☒ True | ☐ False

11. I prefer: (Either/Or)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educators who are a bit quirky and unique.	<input type="checkbox"/> educators who are "normal".
<input type="checkbox"/> serious and studious classroom environments.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> humor in the classroom.
<input type="checkbox"/> always knowing what to expect in the classroom.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unexpected surprises in the classroom.

Student Paper Survey Example Page 2.

## Appendix 2.2 Teacher Paper Survey Example

The following is an example of a teacher's paper survey that was later logged to the online survey database. This example had the most interesting answers of all the surveys filled out by any of the teachers or students in the entire survey process in my opinion. Note: There is a brown slash across the first page which I used as a marker to indicate that I had already logged this particular survey online; this slash was not there when the survey was taken.

University of Helsinki  
English Philology Dept.  
Applied Nonsense Survey  
M.A. Thesis Research by: Lisa Kontio  
This survey is to be filled out after watching  
"The Page Turner" Rube Goldberg, Joseph's Machines:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOMIBdMnV7Q>

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO  
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET  
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

This survey is anonymous, please do not put your name. Please answer all of the following questions. There are multiple choice, True/False, Yes/No, Either/Or, and open-ended questions; for all but the open-ended questions, give only one answer. Thank you for taking part in my research!

1. I am: \*Please select either student or teacher, and then please specify your gender identity

☐ a student and I am: ☐ female ☒ male ☐ other  
☒ a teacher

2. What is your first reaction to this video? Please select the most applicable answer

☒ very positive ☐ somewhat negative  
☐ somewhat positive ☐ very negative  
☐ neutral

3. Do you find the video:

Educational? ☒ Yes | ☐ No  
Creative? ☒ Yes | ☐ No  
Humorous? ☒ Yes | ☐ No  
Fun? ☒ Yes | ☐ No  
Pointless? ☐ Yes | ☒ No  
A waste of your time? ☐ Yes | ☒ No

4. In your experiences as a student, have you enjoyed when your teachers have shown similar "nonsense" videos or implemented some form of silliness/fun into a classroom lesson: ☒ Yes | ☐ No

Please explain your answer further:

*I have started to think creatively*

5. I enjoy:

thinking creatively? ☒ Yes | ☐ No and I find doing this: ☐ Hard | ☒ Easy  
being innovative and/or creating things? ☒ Yes | ☐ No and I find doing this: ☐ Hard | ☒ Easy  
tackling abstract ideas/concepts? ☒ Yes | ☐ No and I find doing this: ☐ Hard | ☒ Easy

Teacher Paper Survey Example Page 1.

6. In which of the following school subjects do you think this video could be appropriate lesson material for:

Chemistry?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
Philosophy?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
English?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
Physics?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
Biology?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
History?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
Social Sciences?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No
Maths?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No

7. If I suggested to you that you can learn more from this 2 minute video than you can from a 75 min lecture, what would be your response:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> absolutely!	<input type="checkbox"/> I highly doubt it...
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> possibly true	<input type="checkbox"/> not true
<input type="checkbox"/> neutral	

8. What does the term "applied nonsense" mean to you:

life

9. My favorite kind of class has lessons surrounding:

<input type="checkbox"/> teacher-centered lecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> inventing or creating some project
<input type="checkbox"/> group work	<input type="checkbox"/> presenting or performing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> class discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> other (please explain): <u>experiments</u>

10. Select whether you feel the following statements are true or false in your opinion:

Any boring subject can be interesting if the teacher presents it in a fun way. ☒ True | ☐ False

Any difficult subject can be made easier if the teacher presents it in a fun way. ☒ True | ☐ False

I learn best when I am enjoying myself. ☒ True | ☐ False

11. I prefer: (Either/Or)

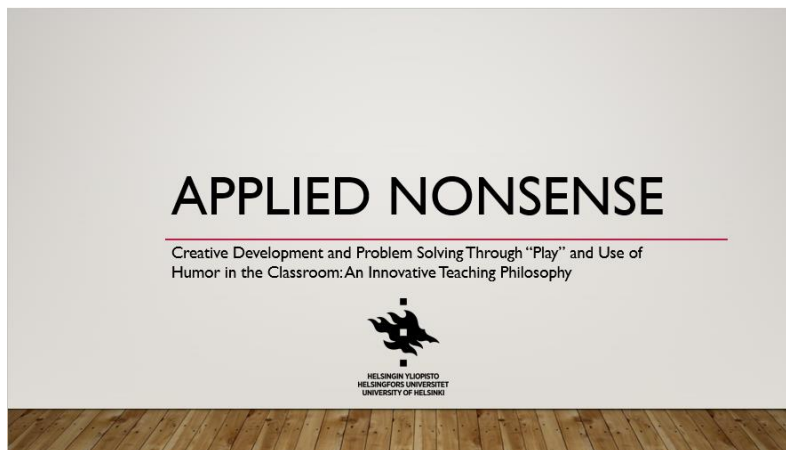
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educators who are a bit quirky and unique.	<input type="checkbox"/> educators who are "normal".
<input type="checkbox"/> serious and studious classroom environments.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> humor in the classroom.
<input type="checkbox"/> always knowing what to expect in the classroom.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unexpected surprises in the classroom.

Teacher Paper Survey Example Page 2.

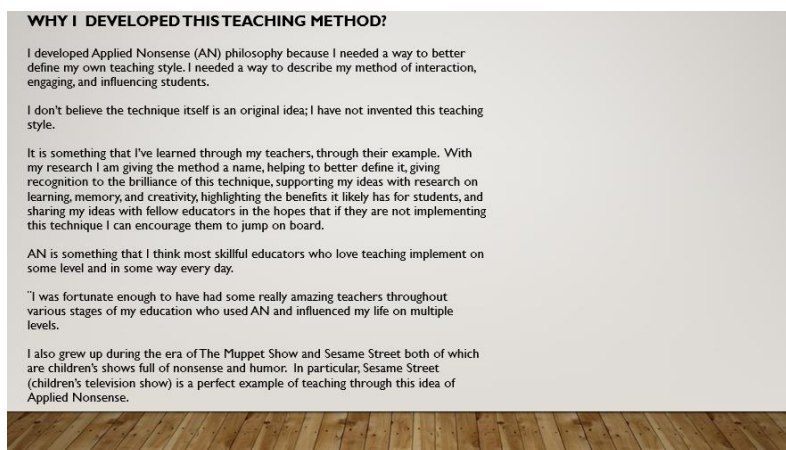


## Appendix 3: AN PowerPoint Presentation for Survey Part II

The following 14 slide PowerPoint was presented to the students at Mattlidens lukio before they took the AN Survey Part II, as part of the survey process. However these slides provided as Appendix 3 have been modified with more written text to fill in for the spoken part of the original presentation. This particular version of the PowerPoint presentation was the one referenced in my paper as having been sent to the participants in the United States who partook in the survey process online.



Slide 1.



Slide 2.

I have spent the last 15 years working with young preschool kids. All day they play and explore and learn through play, all the fundamental building blocks and skills needed for school preparation are done during these years, and always through some element of play. It is clear that this is how children learn best.

I started to wonder why it is that so many teachers stop approaching lessons and topics from an element of play once school starts? Traditionally teachers have been front and center, spewing out information, cramming knowledge in. Thankfully this type of teacher centered lecturing is being phased out/ is frowned upon in modern teaching. Nowadays teachers recognizing that students should be the center of classes, where they are able to have an influence in their own learning, more hands on, creating things, developing things, having discussion and actively thinking about things, and learning to problem solve. The teacher is more of a "guide on the side" and a "bank of knowledge or support". Students have more ability to explore how they learn best, and therefore tailor their learning and make it individual to their learning needs. As well teachers are encouraging and teaching their students self-reflection and peer-reflection skills to help own their own learning process.

(One main reason that traditionally teachers have been front and center is because of standardized testing, particularly in countries like the US where they weigh so heavily on the education system, but also a bit here in Finland, e.g. the matriculation exam. There's this need to cram info in short term to pass these high stakes exams, and sadly the information gets lost after these exams, more often than not. Modern ideas are recognizing that cramming kids full of info is not the best way to prepare them for the real world.)

### Slide 3.

#### THE "WHY" 'S!

Also during these years working with little kids, I never meet a child who was not curious about everything around them. WHY? (why is the dirt brown? What are these purple things under my skin? Where does the sun go at night?)-kids ask the most profound questions and they think up the most amazing explanations for phenomena e.g. "The moon is always following me!"

#### I THINK IT'S UNFORTUNATE:

Why is it that we end up with so many adults who feel they are done learning? Once we get some idea and ability to understand the world around us it's enough, so then there becomes this lost sense of curiosity about the world...

Furthermore, I think it's depressing that there are adults who have negative memories of school. Who feel like their education was a waste of time. They didn't learn anything in school. Information went in and back out. They feel that they can't apply anything they learned in school to the real world. This is a real failure on the part of their teachers.

#### WHY?

Is this interest in certain subjects and lackluster for others, as well as a lack of interest to continue learning beyond the mandatory schooling years a product of our individual personalities and abilities? Or has it more to do with the poor quality of teaching and methods that are uninspiring, ineffective, painfully boring, and not providing students with the challenges and opportunities to learn to love learning and inspire curiosity about subjects? I feel like the latter is the big culprit here. So then, can we do something about this as educators? How can we stop students from disliking school and learning? I feel like we can and I am suggesting that AN can be used in conjunction with other student centered methods of teaching to make students love learning and learn creative problem solving skills.

### Slide 4

## APPLIED NONSENSE

The core goals of Applied Nonsense are 1. To help students develop creative thinking and problem solving skills through using examples of creative innovative material in lessons or as the lesson itself. And 2. To help students develop a love for learning by adding a sense of entertainment to engage them (usually via humor).

This method is one that can be used with any target age group, it just needs to be modified - the content then needs to be age appropriately selected. I feel that the trend is such that older students experience this method less in class, as we age education becomes very serious, for a lot of teachers- my hope is to encourage educators to use AN and take advantage of its benefit for these advanced levels and older students.

**– incorporates this idea of approaching subjects/topics from an angle of 'play'**

It doesn't matter how old we are, we all love to enjoy ourselves and have a good time. The ultimate goal of a teacher is to provide an atmosphere where the students are in a state of flow.

#### A State of FLOW.

Flow is a concept in human psychology where one is thought to be in "the zone" which is a mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, it is when you're fully absorbed in what you're doing and you lose sense of time and self.



**FLOWTHEORY** By: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5QCR1KKms>

### Slide 5

I'm not suggesting AN will make students reach a state of FLOW, but I am suggesting that it can be used as a tool to help engage students in an activity and hopefully help them develop skills that will hopefully help them reach that state of FLOW.

#### WHAT IS APPLIED NONSENSE?

**SURFACE LEVEL:** The occasional use of age appropriate humor, or unexpected sometimes seemingly random materials to positively lighten the atmosphere of the classroom. The idea is to make the "nonsense content" the element of fun, relevant to the learning topic/environment to add another level of learning. It is to be used when applicable, not overly done, but subtly. The content doesn't only have to be in the medium of humor, it can just be playful ideas or concepts as well. **(CORE IDEA: create a positive experience = stored memory of the content in connection to the experience)**

#### APPLIED NONSENSE.



**Creative, flexible thinking is a fundamental building block in problem solving and developing ideas and in innovation. If we focus our education on developing this skill with linking interesting experiences and ideas through teaching, we can offer students more than just jamming them full of information they will likely forget. We can help give them skills they can actually use in life.**

**DEEPER LEVEL:** At a deeper level it is a teaching technique which focuses on flourishing the imagination, innovative thinking skills, and helps students overall develop flexible thinking and creativity. **(I'm proposing /suggesting that creative thinking is a skill that can be learned and taught through example and experiences)** By presenting creative ideas and high brow humor, and linking these content to the topics we are helping students learn to implement this skill by example. It takes time, energy, and creativity to develop this kind of lesson and material, but I am suggesting that this kind of method pays off because this creative process is being learned by example in addition to the direct teaching content.

I'm suggesting that AN is a tool that can be used to help foster creative thinking skills in students.

### Slide 6

## Why do I think helping students develop creative thinking and problem solving skills is so important?

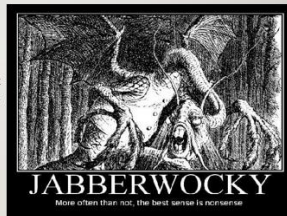
IMO it's perhaps the most useful and needed skill in life.

The people who are most successful in life and are remembered throughout history were/are creative people: artists, musicians, scientists, writers, poets, architects, inventors, entrepreneurs, directors, comedians, actors etc.

For the average person, it is arguable that the ability to be creative and problem solve in creative ways will:

Increase your successes in life and give you advantages over people who lack the ability to "think outside the box". Help solve the unknown problems waiting for us in the future!! (OUT OF OUR MINDS)

Increases your happiness and quality of life by adding more layers of appreciation in your life as well as self satisfaction and self gratification. (FLOW)



### Slide 7

**APPLIED NONSENSE.** When there must be moments of teacher centered lecture or monologues, there must be moments of humor, creativity, fun, light hearted ways of linking ideas to real life, or other larger concepts. Otherwise we will lose student's attention.

#### INTERNET AND TECHNOLOGY (very useful tools for AN)

This can be accomplished with images, memes, gifs, short videos, audio clips, music, apps, games, etc. Then the old fashioned live action something (e.g. short performance, props, wearing a funny t-shirt). Furthermore these resources can be used as the actual activity/material or then to bolster or support other more serious material or aspects of the lesson or information being presented, or then to link it to something unexpected.



Does it look like I've goat time for this nonsense?



### Slide 8

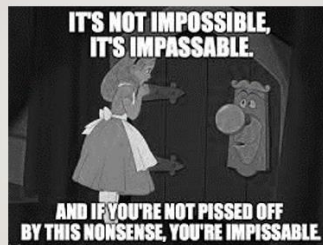
e.g.



Images can say a lot. And grab our attention. They can make an impact on us or leave a lasting impression where a discussion alone might be forgotten..

Slide 9.

e.g.



Sometimes the humor will miss its mark... Students might find something "cheesy" or "unbearable". But I feel that making attempts to add humor will create a sense of rapport and trust between the teacher and most students, as well it makes the classroom environment more laid back and less intimidating to those students who might find the subject challenging. And it's okay for the teacher to be the biggest dork in the class, say we miss our mark. Perhaps we do it intentionally sometimes as well.

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Other ways to implement the Applied Nonsense method:

The main material of the lesson can be something entertaining or nonsensical that's applied to make the activity more interesting:

e.g. an **English Grammar Lesson**.

Most people find this task tedious and/or awful.

**Parsing sentences**, (AKA picking out the parts of speech).

UGH.

The sentence examples that are given for parsing can be a source to engage students in the activity. They can be: e.g. humorous excerpts from the news, a joke, or sentences are that just ridiculous.

The material can be manipulated in an age appropriate way to make this mundane task more enjoyable and less painful.

e.g.

Sentence examples:

**One morning I fed an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I'll never know.**

(As a joke you can have them try to parse this sentence (which is FYI grammatically correct)):

**Buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo.**

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## The classroom aesthetics.

The method can carry over to the classroom decoration.

Should be a place that invites curiosity and engages the students (I think most primary school teachers are really good about implementing this in their classroom environments).

e.g.

My 8<sup>th</sup> grade Physics teacher Mr. Price looked quite much like "Albert Einstein" and he had photos of Einstein all over his room. I think he even intentionally kept his hair in Einstein style and his wardrobe/ensembles as well.



This Physics teacher has a sense of humor: random Physics teacher's bathroom pass

Slide 12.



## A Master of Applied Nonsense:

Dr. Seuss. 20<sup>th</sup> century North American children's book writer and illustrator (among other things)

This page spread is from Dr. Seuss' "Cat Quizzer" picture book.

He created the perfect tool for teachers to teach through nonsense and it's brilliant. These books are often used for teaching phonics and reading to beginning English readers due to their use of playful rhymes. (Let's forgo the politics of Mr. Seuss's personal life or beliefs : )

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## DRAWBACKS and DOWNFALLS OF APPLIED NONSENSE

Not everyone's cup of tea (both for teachers and learners)  
There are just some people/adults who are very serious minded and dislike "playful" content or ideas. (HOWEVER, perhaps if we caught these people early enough in life and in their education and introduced some humor into their lives they would be happier people for it, more playful, or at least more open to it!!)

If it doesn't feel natural to a teacher, it is hard to use this method.

Very open to interpretation which can be both good and bad.

HOWEVER,

There is no one teaching philosophy or personality that works perfectly for every student or every teacher. Furthermore there are aspects of this teaching philosophy that can be applied to all types of lessons and that are hopefully "universally" understood and accepted amongst modern teachers. So my hope is that there are aspects of this philosophy that can be used by everyone and that benefit everyone, on some level.

RESEARCH: HUMOR QUALITY OF LIFE- why I think humor is something that should be imparted on everyone.

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